

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Robson, Fiona (2009) Managing absence in the UK public sector : the role of first line managers. Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University.

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<https://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/281/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Robson, Fiona (2009) Managing absence in the UK public sector : the role of first line managers. Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University.

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/281/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

**Managing Absence in the
UK Public Sector:
The role of First Line Managers.**

Fiona Jane Robson

PhD

2008

**Managing Absence in the
UK Public Sector:
The role of First Line Managers.**

Fiona Jane Robson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of the University of
Northumbria at Newcastle for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Research undertaken in
Newcastle Business School

September 2008

THESIS/SUBMISSION COPYRIGHT DECLARATION

Title of thesis/submission: Managing absence in the UK
Public Sector: The role of
First Line managers
.....
.....

Author: Fiona Jane Robson
.....

Research undertaken in collaboration with: Newcastle Business
School
.....

I, Fiona Jane Robson, the undersigned,
claim copyright of the above described thesis/submission and declare that no
quotation from it or information from it may be published without my prior
written consent.

Signed:

Date: 5/3/2009
.....

Abstract

This study investigates the characteristics of first line managers (FLMs) required to manage absence 'effectively' within Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council. An important theoretical contribution to knowledge is made by focusing specifically on the role and impact of FLMs which is an issue that has previously been identified as being important, but has not been researched specifically.

A wide range of literature was explored from the fields of health management, psychology and business management to present a clear picture of the key issues involved in absence management. Discussions are provided on personal, organisational and group level characteristics which have been found to have an association with levels of employee absence, before looking at best practice in the management interventions that can be used. Five major hypotheses were generated from the literature and were further broken down into 21 testable sub-hypotheses.

A positivist approach was taken using a quantitative methodology in order to meet the objectives of this study. This consisted of a range of research methods including a survey to FLMs, policy analysis and analysis of internal organisational documents. Using this variety of methods a clear picture of existing practices was developed and then analysed. This extensive methodological approach makes an interesting contribution to this research field and is in response to some earlier criticisms of research designs in this area.

The survey results show multiple statistically significant relationships between variables and levels of absence including; the age of the FLMs; the division ($p=0.01$) and departments ($p=0.02$) in which the FLMs work, and their levels of knowledge of the organisation's absence management policy and procedures ($p=0.048$). This allowed the rejection of the null hypotheses and states that there is an association between these variables and levels of absence of the FLMs' employees. However, there are also other interesting results that are of high practical significance despite the results not being *statistically* significant. This includes looking at relationships between variables such as career history and relationships with other stakeholders, when correlated with the absence levels of the FLMs' employees.

The main results from the other research methods utilised in this study demonstrate that there is some ambiguity over responsibilities for managing absence and that absence management is not fully integrated into associated HR policies. Despite attempts to implement best practice interventions, there remain some indications of differences between rhetoric and reality.

Recommendations for the organisation include the need to include supplementary details in their absence management policy and to condense the seven existing documents into one comprehensive policy guide. In addition the organisation needs to support their FLMs so that they understand exactly what their role in absence management entails and how and when they should work in partnership with other stakeholders.

Table of Contents

Chapter One.....	1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Background to the research	1
1.3. Research aims and objectives	2
1.4. Research methods	3
1.5. Outline of the thesis	3
Chapter Two.....	6
2.1. Preface	6
2.2. GMBC.....	6
2.3. Organisation structure	7
2.4. Overall workforce characteristics	8
2.5. Introduction to hotspot divisions.....	12
2.6. Workforce characteristics in hotspot divisions	13
2.7. Levels of absence	16
2.8. Reasons for absence in GMBC.....	18
2.9. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities	19
2.10. Sickness absence in the hotspot divisions.....	20
2.11. Characteristics of absences	25
2.12. Summary	27
Chapter Three	28
3.1. Introduction.....	28
3.2. Definition of key terms and measurement issues	29
3.2.1. Key terms relevant to absence research	29
3.2.2. Measurement issues in absence research	32
3.3. Scope of the study	34
3.4. Introduction to FLMS	36
3.4.1. The devolution of HR responsibilities to FLMS.....	37
3.4.2. Challenges associated with FLMS carrying out HR responsibilities.....	41
3.4.3. The role of FLMS: moving forwards.....	43
3.5. Employee absence in the UK: An introduction.....	45
3.5.1. The overall picture.....	45
3.5.2. Reasons for absence	46
3.5.3. Absence management in the UK public sector	48
3.5.4. Comparing absence levels between the public and private sectors	49
3.5.5. Reasons for higher levels of absence in the public sector.....	51
3.6. Linking the key concepts: The role of FLMS in managing absence	53
3.7. The key foci of existing research into sickness absence	55
3.7.1. Variables related to 'personal characteristics' and levels of sickness absence.....	57
3.7.1.1. Variables related to the 'personal characteristics' of employees and levels of sickness absence.	57
3.7.1.2. Variables related to personal characteristics of FLMS and levels of sickness absence. 61	

3.7.2.	Variables related to 'organisational characteristics' and levels of sickness absence	63
3.7.3.	Variables related to 'general work attitudes' and levels of sickness absence.	71
3.7.3.1.	Variables related to 'general work attitudes' of employees.....	71
3.7.3.2.	Variables related to 'general work attitudes' of FLMs and levels of sickness absence.	76
3.7.4.	Variables related to 'knowledge of absence' and levels of sickness absence.....	79
3.7.4.1.	A review of best practice in managing absence.....	80
3.8.	Summary: Potential characteristics of FLMs required to manage absence effectively	101
3.9.	Identifying the gap in the theoretical research base	104
3.10.	Methodological issues in absence research	104
3.11.	Discussion	106
Chapter Four		108
4.1.	Aims of chapter	108
4.2.	Research question and objectives	108
4.3.	Epistemology.....	109
4.4.	Theoretical perspective	111
4.5.	Methodological approach	113
4.6.	Development of hypotheses.....	114
4.6.1.	Hypothesis One.....	117
4.6.2.	Hypothesis Two.....	118
4.6.3.	Hypothesis Three	119
4.6.4.	Hypothesis Four	120
4.6.5.	Hypothesis Five.....	121
4.7.	Research Methods	122
4.7.1.	Surveys to FLMs	122
4.7.1.1.	Survey design.....	124
4.7.1.2.	Construction of the survey questions	126
4.7.1.3.	Pilot study.....	129
4.7.1.4.	Sample	131
4.7.1.5.	Challenges encountered with using questionnaires.....	131
4.7.1.6.	Use of electronic questionnaires	132
4.7.1.7.	Measurement issues	133
4.7.1.8.	Data analysis.....	136
4.7.2.	Analysing secondary data	141
4.7.2.1.	Organisational absence data	143
4.7.2.2.	Analysis of organisational policies	145
4.7.2.2.1.	Absence management policies and procedures	145
4.7.2.2.2.	General HR policies	148
4.7.2.3.	Analysis of general organisational documents.....	149
4.8.	Negotiating access to GMBC	151

4.9.	Ethical considerations	153
4.10.	Reliability	155
4.11.	Limitations of this study	155
4.12.	Summary of chapter	159
	Chapter Five	161
5.1.	Introduction	161
5.2.	Analysis of organisational policies	164
5.2.1.	Analysis of organisational absence policies	164
5.2.1.1.	Analysis at the policy level	167
5.2.1.2.	Investigating the policies by key themes	170
5.2.1.3.	Analysis of the 21 criteria	171
5.2.1.4.	Summary of analysis of absence management policies and procedures	174
5.2.2.	Analysis of organisational HR policies	175
5.2.2.1.	Analysis at the individual policy level	177
5.2.2.2.	Analysis at the individual criteria level	179
5.2.2.3.	Summary of analysis of HR policies	180
5.2.3.	Overall summary of GMBC policy analysis	181
5.3.	Analysis of key internal documents	181
5.3.1.	Employee focused documents	182
5.3.2.	Analysis of corporate documents	185
5.3.3.	Analysis of Councillor-led documents	186
5.4.	Summary: Secondary data sources	194
	Chapter Six	198
6.1.	Introduction	198
6.2.	Structure of the chapter	199
6.3.	Response rate	200
6.4.	Characteristics of respondents	201
6.5.	Investigation of data	204
6.5.1.	Absence in your team	204
6.5.2.	Your role in managing absence at Gateshead Council	205
6.5.3.	General work attitudes	212
6.5.4.	Your role as a manager at Gateshead Council	214
6.5.5.	Perceptions of your role in absence management	216
6.6.	Survey reliability	218
6.7.	Further investigation of the survey data	220
6.7.1.	Hypothesis 1 – Association between personal characteristics and levels of absence 225	
6.7.1.1.	Investigating differences between levels of absence and gender of FLMs ..	225
6.7.1.2.	Investigating differences between levels of absence and age of FLMs	226
6.7.1.3.	Investigating associations between levels of absence and length of service of FLMs	227

6.7.1.4.	Investigating associations between levels of absence and job grade of FLMs	227
6.7.1.5.	Investigating associations between the levels of absence and the personal absence record of the FLMs	228
6.7.1.6.	Investigating associations between levels of absence and the career history of FLMs	229
6.7.1.7.	Summary of Hypothesis 1	229
6.7.2.	Hypothesis 2 – Association between organisational characteristics and levels of absence	229
6.7.2.1.	Division	230
6.7.2.2.	Department	230
6.7.2.3.	Total number of employees	231
6.7.2.4.	Number of part time employees	232
6.7.2.5.	Summary of Hypothesis 2	232
6.7.3.	Hypothesis 3 – Association between general work attitudes and levels of absence	233
6.7.3.1.	Job satisfaction	233
6.7.3.2.	Organisation commitment	234
6.7.3.3.	Acceptance of people management responsibilities	235
6.7.3.4.	Management style	235
6.7.3.5.	Support from stakeholders	236
6.7.3.6.	Summary of Hypothesis 3	236
6.7.4.	Hypothesis 4 – Association between knowledge of absence and associated HR policies and levels of absence	238
6.7.4.1.	Knowledge of absence management policies and procedures	238
6.7.4.2.	Knowledge of associated HR policies and procedures	239
6.7.4.3.	Summary of Hypothesis 4	240
6.7.5.	Hypothesis 5 – Attitudes towards absence and associated HR policies and level	241
6.7.5.1.	Attitudes towards managing absence	241
6.7.5.2.	Confidence in carrying out their role in absence management	241
6.7.5.3.	Confidence in applying related HR policies and procedures	242
6.7.5.4.	Conscientiousness in applying absence management policies and procedures	243
6.7.5.5.	Summary of Hypothesis 5	244
6.8.	Limitations of the survey analysis	244
6.9.	Summary	245
	Chapter Seven	249
7.1.	Introduction	249
7.2.	Research conclusions	249
7.2.1.	Primary research	252
7.2.2.	Secondary research	256
7.2.3.	Overall research findings	260

7.3.	Contribution to knowledge.....	264
7.4.	Recommendations for practice	267
7.4.1.	Overall recommendations	267
7.4.2.	Recommendations for public sector organisations	268
7.4.3.	Recommendations for GMBC	269
7.5.	Strengths and limitations of this research	271
7.5.1.	Strengths	271
7.5.2.	Limitations	272
7.6.	Areas for future research	274
8.	Appendices.....	276
	Appendix One - Informed consent form	277
	Appendix Two - Scores for absence management policies and procedures.....	279
	Appendix Three - Scores of GMBC's associated HR policies and procedures	280
	Appendix Four - Covering letter distributed with paper surveys	281
	Appendix Five - Paper based survey completed by FLM respondents	283
	Appendix Six - Descriptive statistics from survey to FLMs	290
	Appendix Seven - Responses to Question E1.....	338
	Appendix Eight - Cultural aspects that might influence sickness absence.....	339
	Appendix Nine - Recommendations from Ritchie et al. (2005) on desirable features of absence recording systems	340
	Appendix Ten - Peer-reviewed work created and disseminated by the author on the subject of absence management.....	341
9.	References	400
10.	Bibliography.....	438

List of Figures

Figure 1 GMBC Senior Management Team structure	7
Figure 2 GMBC Service Groups/Divisions	8
Figure 3 Age profile of GMBC employees	9
Figure 4 Length of service of GMBC employees	10
Figure 5 Job grades of GMBC employees	11
Figure 6 Organisation structure for Central Services Division	13
Figure 7 Organisation structure for Community Based Services	13
Figure 8 Performance indicator definition for BVPI 12: Working days lost to sickness absence (Source: Audit Commission, 2005 p.44)	16
Figure 9 Reasons for absence in the financial year 2005-2006	18
Figure 10 Reasons for absence in the financial year 2006-2007	19
Figure 11 Average number of days of absence on a monthly basis in CBS and CES	21
Figure 12 Reasons for absence in 2005-06	21
Figure 13 Reasons for absence 2006-07	22
Figure 14 Average number of days of absence by job grade	26
Figure 15 Average number of days of absence by length of service	26
Figure 16 Calculation to generate Bradford factor scores as a measurement of sickness absence	33
Figure 17 Forms of short-term absence (Hammer and Landau, 1981)	34
Figure 18 Summary of people management tasks undertaken by FLMs as evidenced in extant research	40
Figure 19 Roles carried out by FLMs in the managing absence process	54
Figure 20 Model of Attendance Motivation by Nicholson, N. (1977) 'Absence behaviour and attendance motivation: A conceptual synthesis',	65
Figure 21 Major influences on employee attendance: A process model by Steers, R.M. and Rhodes, S.R. (1978) 'Major influences on employee attendance: A process model',	66
Figure 22 Causal model of absenteeism by Brooke, P.P. (1986) 'Beyond the Rhodes and Steers model of attendance'	67
Figure 23 Rhodes and Steers' Model of Attendance by Rhodes, S and Steers, R.M. (1990) Managing employee absenteeism	69
Figure 24 Factors affecting an employee's decision to be absent (Martocchio and Judge, 1994:362)	69
Figure 25 Overview of absence management interventions identified by the researcher through the review of the existing theory base	80
Figure 26 Good practice guidance: the content of absence policies (Adapted from Acas, 2006)	82
Figure 27 Conceptual model developed for this study, derived from extant research	103
Figure 28 Objectives of this study	108
Figure 29 Overview of research approach	109
Figure 30 Conceptual model for this study	116
Figure 31 Research methods employed in the study	122
Figure 32 Overview of piloting process	130
Figure 33 Summary of feedback received from survey pilots	130
Figure 34 Overview of secondary research methods used in this study	141
Figure 35 Overview of information analysed on GMBC	142
Figure 36 Best value performance indicators used in the study	143
Figure 37 Categories of medical reasons for absence	144
Figure 38 Criteria to evaluate absence management policies and procedures	146
Figure 39 GMBC's absence management policies and procedures reviewed in the study	147
Figure 40 Organisational HR policies reviewed within the study	149
Figure 41 Criteria used to evaluate GMBC's HR policies	149
Figure 42 Framework demonstrating the links between characteristics of FLMs and the importance of policies	163
Figure 43 Overview of non-survey research methods employed in the study	163
Figure 44 Criteria for analysing absence policies and procedures	166
Figure 45 Absence policies and procedures used by the organisation	167
Figure 46 Analysis of policies and procedures against 21 good practice criteria	168
Figure 47 Analysis of scores for each criterion	172
Figure 48 GMBC's HR policies analysed during this study	176
Figure 49 Criteria used to assess GMBC's general HR policies	177

<i>Figure 50 Analysis of associated HR policies</i>	<i>178</i>
<i>Figure 51 Analysis of criterion used to analyse HR policies</i>	<i>179</i>
<i>Figure 52 Excerpts from Absence Management Procedure (GMBC, 2006c:3)</i>	<i>180</i>
<i>Figure 53 Overview of scope of CVOS Committee</i>	<i>187</i>
<i>Figure 54 Stages undertaken in the absence management review process</i>	<i>188</i>
<i>Figure 55 Key issues identified in internal review</i>	<i>189</i>
<i>Figure 56 Recommendations for improving absence management practices</i>	<i>191</i>
<i>Figure 57 Percentage of return-to-work interviews completed</i>	<i>192</i>
<i>Figure 58 Framework demonstrating the links between characteristics of FLMS and the importance of policies</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>Figure 59 Respondents by job grade</i>	<i>202</i>
<i>Figure 60 Number of days of absence reported by respondents</i>	<i>203</i>
<i>Figure 61 Reasons why absence levels are not regularly monitored</i>	<i>208</i>
<i>Figure 62 Ratings for levels of support received from internal stakeholders</i>	<i>210</i>
<i>Figure 63 Self-rating of knowledge of HR policies</i>	<i>211</i>
<i>Figure 64 Self-rating of confidence in applying HR policies</i>	<i>212</i>
<i>Figure 65 Words that respondents chose to describe their own management style</i>	<i>215</i>
<i>Figure 66 Revised conceptual model for this study</i>	<i>247</i>
<i>Figure 67 Final conceptual model for this study</i>	<i>255</i>
<i>Figure 68 Framework demonstrating the links between characteristics of FLMS and the importance of policies</i>	<i>257</i>
<i>Figure 69 Positive aspects of GMBC's absence management process</i>	<i>271</i>

List of Tables

Table 1 Data for BVPIs 15 and 16A from 2004-07	12
Table 2 Gender and age range of GMBC employees	14
Table 3 Lengths of service for GMBC employees	14
Table 4 Pay grades for GMBC employees	15
Table 5 Levels of sickness absence at GMBC from 2004-2007.....	17
Table 6 Absence levels across North East Local Authorities from 2004-2007 (DCLG, 2008) ...	20
Table 7 Reasons for absence in CES departments.....	23
Table 8 Reasons for absence in CBS departments.....	24
Table 9 Overview of existing research on relationship between job satisfaction and absence ..	72
Table 10 Overview of criteria to analyse absence policies.....	83
Table 11 Absence interventions identified by Johnson et al. (2003: 341)	97
Table 12 Summary of sources of extant research which guided the hypotheses for this study.	102
Table 13 Sub-hypotheses for first hypothesis.....	117
Table 14 Sub-hypotheses for second hypothesis.....	118
Table 15 Sub-hypotheses for third hypothesis.....	119
Table 16 Sub-hypotheses for fourth hypothesis	120
Table 17 Sub-hypotheses for fifth hypothesis.....	121
Table 18 Research methods used by UK-based absence researchers	124
Table 19 Overall survey response rate	126
Table 20 Questions with the highest non-response rates.....	127
Table 21 Overview of statistical tests used to analyse survey data.....	137
Table 22 Overview of internal documents analysed	150
Table 23 Analysis of scores for groups of criteria.....	170
Table 24 Key internal documents analysed as part of this study.....	182
Table 25 Questions with highest non-response rates.....	200
Table 26 Responsibility for managing different aspects of absence	205
Table 27 Issues preventing FLMs from carrying out their absence management responsibilities	209
Table 28 Responses to general work attitudes statements	212
Table 29 Responses to statements about management style.....	215
Table 30 Responses to statements on managing absence.....	217
Table 31 Reliability scores using Cronbach's alpha coefficient	219
Table 32 Overview of statistical tests used to analyse survey data.....	221
Table 33 Maximum scores for statements	239
Table 34 Final summary of research objectives	251
Table 35 Overview of key hypotheses	254

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to the support provided by Professor Sharon Mavin and Andrew Robson throughout the last three years in their role as my Doctoral Supervisors. Specifically I would like to thank them for their patience and continuous constructive feedback as well as their subject and methods-based expertise.

I would like to express gratitude to Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council for allowing me to conduct my research in their organisation, and particularly Jeff Dean, Head of Corporate Services and Heidi Brown, HR Adviser who have both been incredibly generous with their support for this research.

On a personal level I would like to thank my wonderful husband, parents, and sister who have been an amazing source of encouragement and strength for me over the last three years.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name: Fiona Robson

Signature:

Date: 23 November 2008

Chapter One

Introduction to the thesis

1.1. Introduction

The research question for this study is: *What are the characteristics of first line managers (FLMs) required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?* This question is answered within this deductive research study carried out within the case study organisation of Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council (GMBC). This Doctoral research explores the characteristics of FLMs required to 'effectively' manage absence, using a quantitative methodology to explore a series of relationships which have been hypothesised following the extensive review of the literature. For the purpose of this study 'effectively' in the context of effective absence management has been defined by the researcher as:

Managing absence by minimising non-genuine absences so employees are only absent when they are unable to attend; whilst at the same time, ensuring that genuinely absent employees receive appropriate levels of support in line with the organisation's policies and procedures.

1.2. Background to the research

This research combines two interesting areas of human resource management; managing sickness absence and the role of FLMs. Managing sickness absence is a huge issues for both organisations and the UK economy as a whole. Latest calculations by CBI (2008) show the cost is £13.2 billion to the UK economy, which works out at £517 per employee per year in direct costs alone. Focusing specifically on Local Authorities, the annual cost of absence is estimated to be £900 million (Cabinet Office, 2004). This provides a strong rationale for understanding how absence is managed in organisations and the interventions which can be used to manage absence more effectively.

The issue is also of importance to academics, confirmed in the broad range of literature and empirical research available in this area. Since two of the classic studies were published in the 1970s (Nicholson, 1977 and Steers and Rhodes, 1978) there has been a range of trends in the type of published research.

This has included methods of measuring absence, characteristics of absent employees, interventions to reduce absence and predicting levels of absence. The last decade has seen the introduction of several practitioner focused surveys and reports focusing specifically on absence management. Authors of this work include Government departments, professional bodies and other key employment stakeholders.

The vital role played by FLMS in organisations was recognised in the work of Purcell et al. (2003) and has been researched in detail when looking at a range of people management issues. This has included the role they play in; training and development (Maxwell and Watson, 2006 and CIPD, 2007e); change management (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995); reward (CIPD, 2007f) and managing performance (Harney and Jordan, 2008).

To date, there is a general consensus across the literature that FLMS play an important role in the effective management of sickness absence (Cabinet Office, 2004; Cunningham, James and Dibben, 2006 and CIPD, 2007b). Surprisingly, this issue has never been investigated in depth empirically and much of the existing research is based on anecdotal evidence. This study addresses the specific issue and therefore bridges the gap between the theory base on absence management and the role of FLMS in people management. The nature of this subject area provides the potential to contribute to both academic theory and organisational performance.

1.3. Research aims and objectives

To answer the research question: *What are the characteristics of FLMS required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?* the following research aims are addressed within this study:

- To establish *the characteristics of FLMS required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations* by involving FLMS in primary research.
- To review literature in relation to the effective management of absence, and approaches in the public sector to establish a gap of existing knowledge.

- To investigate how absence should be managed holistically through an analysis of the organisation's absence management policies, to support the role played by FLMS.
- To design and implement an appropriate methodology and quantitative methods to establish the characteristics of FLMS to 'effectively' manage absence.
- To analyse the data and synthesise with extant research in order to progress the current theory base and enable an original contribution to knowledge.
- To communicate the findings of the research to the benefit of public sector organisations.

1.4. Research methods

Two 'hotspot' divisions were selected from within GMBC as the focus of the study; chosen on the basis of being the 'best' and 'worst' performing departments when measured by average levels of sickness absence. This research adopted a positivist approach using a quantitative methodology in order to meet the objectives of this study. This consisted of a range of research methods including a survey to FLMS, policy analysis of the organisation's absence management and associated HR policies and procedures and analysis of key internal documents.

Using this variety of methods a clear picture of existing practices was developed and then analysed. The research methods chapter provides a clear overview of the journey taken by this research and the practical issues involved in designing the research methods.

1.5. Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, an overview of which is provided overleaf. Within each chapter, explicit links are made to highlight the research objective(s) relevant to that chapter and how they support the answering of the research question for this study.

Chapter Two provides an introduction to the organisation where this study takes place. This includes an overview of the organisational and management structure; demographics of the organisation's employees and an insight into the two departments which participated in the primary research. Contextual information is also provided on levels of sickness absence (and the reasons for absence) in the organisation and benchmarking data from other local authorities.

Chapter Three reviews the literature which is relevant to this study and helps to meet the overall objectives of the research. The diverse range of literature reflects the information available, and the chapter brings together the work on managing sickness absence, alongside the role of FLMs in organisations.

Chapter Four introduces the research methods employed in this study, beginning with an explanation of the ontological and epistemological route followed. This is followed by a discussion of the methodology and research methods used. Clear links are made with how the chosen methods enable the research objectives to be addressed and how they compare with the methods used within the existing theory base in this area.

Chapter Five presents the results from the secondary research methods utilised in this study. This includes analysis of the organisation's absence policies and procedures; associated HR policies and key internal documents. Measurement against best practice criteria is presented as well as identification of areas that could be developed further by the organisation. The key internal documents include two sets of employee survey results, minutes from relevant council meetings and organisational strategies and associated documents. The discussion of the data analysis is provided alongside an interpretation of how these results compare to extant research.

Chapter Six focuses on the results from the analysis of the survey data. This includes an initial univariate analysis followed by further analysis of the data using appropriate statistical tests. Within this chapter, the hypotheses and sub-hypotheses are tested and the results are presented alongside a discussion of what the test results mean in relation to this study. The results are synthesised with the literature to demonstrate common findings and illustrate the contribution made by this study.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by presenting the overall conclusions from this research. This includes an evaluation of the contribution to knowledge made by this work and how it builds upon existing research. A series of practical recommendations for GMBC and wider public sector organisations have been identified before the outline is provided of some areas for future research.

The next chapter provides contextual information on the case study organisation: Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council. An introduction to the organisation is provided alongside an overview of the operational environment, and their workforce characteristics, including demographic information and analysis of their sickness absence data.

Chapter Two

Setting the context:

An introduction to Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council (GMBC)

2.1. Preface

Research by SESR (2007) suggests that public sector organisations have some important defining characteristics which can impact on the way they operate and manage and engage with their employees. With this in mind, this chapter provides an introduction to the case study organisation and its absence data. This is essential to be able to answer the research question for this study: *What are the characteristics of FLMs required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?*

The rationale provided in the previous chapter provided justification of why managing absence is an important issue for organisations, and this chapter focuses specifically on levels of absence at GMBC, enhancing this argument further.

As part of a quantitative study, it is important to present the absence data for the organisation over the three year period which is the focus of this research. To set the context, comparative data is also discussed so the whole picture can be obtained; this is enhanced further by the use of benchmarking data from other local authorities.

2.2. GMBC

Gateshead is located in the north east of England and has a population of 191,500 (GMBC, 2007d). The Audit Commission (2006:10) describe it as a diverse area whereby *"it is a borough of contrasts; over half of Gateshead is rural, but there is also a large urban centre, and areas of industrial decline"*. There are also multiple sources to suggest that Gateshead as a Borough has challenges in relation to the prosperity of its residents. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 identified 33 areas (containing around 1,500 households each) in Gateshead that fall into the top 10% most deprived in England and Wales (GMBC, 2004b). The Audit Commission (2006:10) also revealed *"It is a mostly low wage earning economy"*.

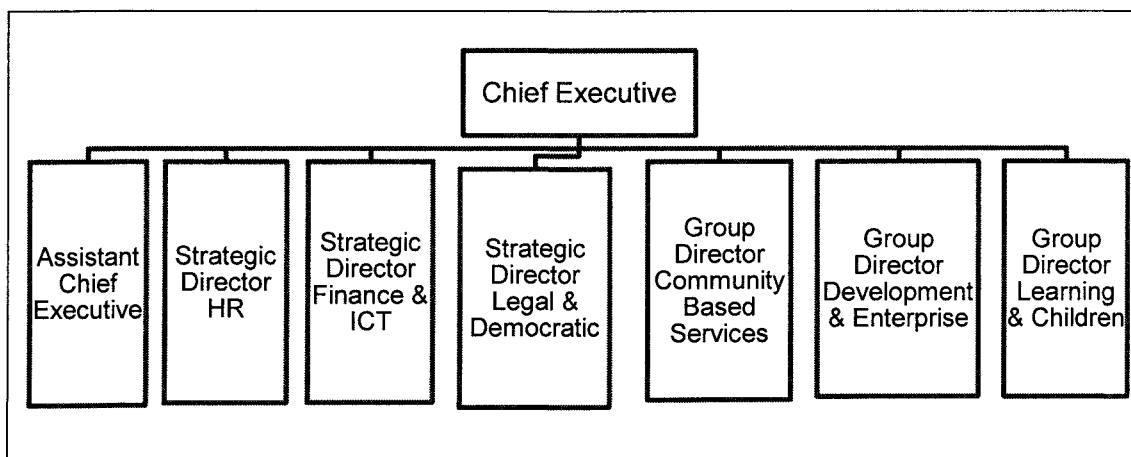
It is useful to provide this background information as within the north east of England, public sector organisations have the highest rate of employment in the UK (Millard, 2007). This is certainly the case for GMBC, where a large percentage of their workforce also resides in the borough. These details may also have an indirect impact on absence levels as research by Wynn and Low (2008) has shown a potential correlation between absence levels and position in the deprivation index of the Borough in which the organisation is situated.

In addition, data suggest the health of residents in the borough is relatively poor, as stated in GMBC (2007d) *“Gateshead is below the national average for people who consider their health to be good – and below the average for those who describe their health as ‘not good’. The number of local people with a limiting long-term illness has increased by 39% since 1991 – this is the highest score of all 376 England and Wales authorities”*. As GMBC employs a large number of its workforce from residents located within the borough, this may indicate that some of the people that they employ may suffer from pre-existing conditions or ill-health. Ultimately this may lead to periods of sickness absence from work which is outside of the control of the organisation. This issue of health has been brought to the front of the agenda by the recent report published by Dame Carol Black (Black, 2008) which reports that the health of individuals can impact on a much wider scale, including employers.

2.3. Organisation structure

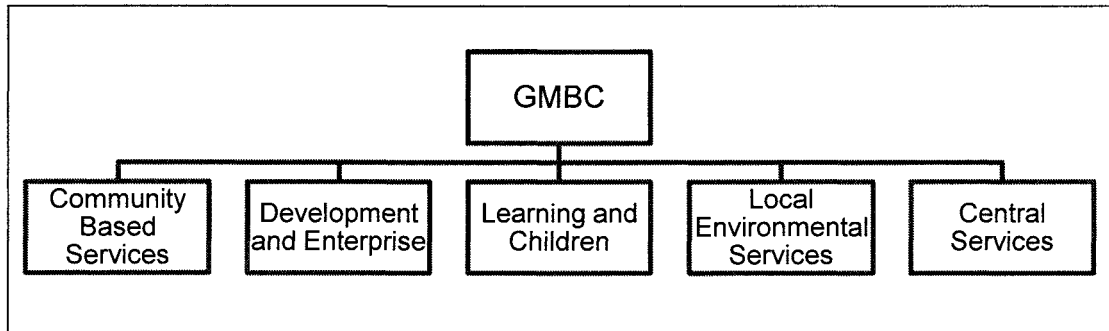
The Chief Executive leads the Council’s Senior Management Team; the composition of the rest of this team is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 GMBC Senior Management Team structure



There are five 'service areas' within Gateshead Council (as shown in Figure 2), including one central department (referred to as Central Services). Within each of the five areas is a number of departments, each led by a Head of Service who takes responsibility for the day to day running of the service and the management of employees. There have been no significant changes in the organisation structure during the period in which this research has been carried out.

Figure 2 GMBC Service Groups/Divisions



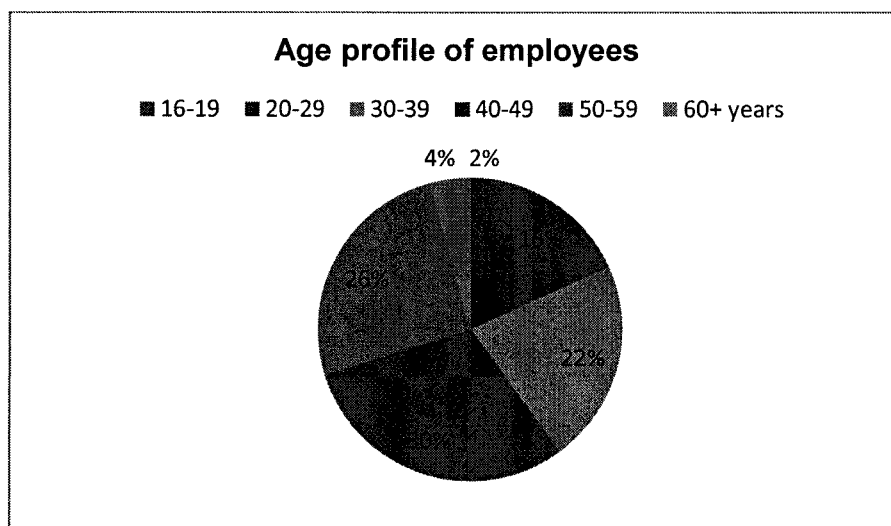
2.4. Overall workforce characteristics

GMBC employs over 13,000 people, over half of which (51%) work on a part-time basis. This was not a surprising finding as Heap (2005:497) states that *"the public sector historically has employed a larger percentage of its staff on a part-time basis compared with the private sector"*. A further breakdown of the demographics of the organisation's employees shows that over two thirds of the organisation's workforce are female (66.4%). This is consistent with the findings of Horder (1999) and Millard and Machin (2007) who found that public sector organisations tend to have a higher percentage of female workers than their private sector counterparts. This suggests that the workforce characteristics of GMBC are representative of UK Local Authorities which may aid the generalisability of this study.

It is also interesting to note the difference between genders in terms of the split of employees who work part time. Slightly less than half of all female employees (40.4%) are classed as part time workers compared with less than 10% of men (8.2%). In terms of ethnicity the vast majority of GMBC employees are classified as White, British (89.5%). However, this is representative of the total population of Gateshead as the 2001 Census showed the vast majority of the local population (98.4%) to be White British (GMBC, 2003).

Figure 3 demonstrates the breakdown by age of the organisation's employees and shows that the majority of their employees (59.57%) are aged 40–60. This suggests that in the coming years they may encounter a problem when these employees retire there may potentially be a large gap to fill. This issue has been recognised by the organisation and is reflected within their new recruitment strategy where they are trying to target some of their recruitment specifically at younger people (working within the age discrimination legislation). This skewed age profile is also consistent with the findings of Horder (1999) and the results from Heap (2005) who found that 72% of public sector workers were aged 35 and over, compared with 62% in the private sector. The age profile is also consistent with the findings of Millard and Machin (2007) who confirm that this is a common public sector workforce trait.

Figure 3 Age profile of GMBC employees

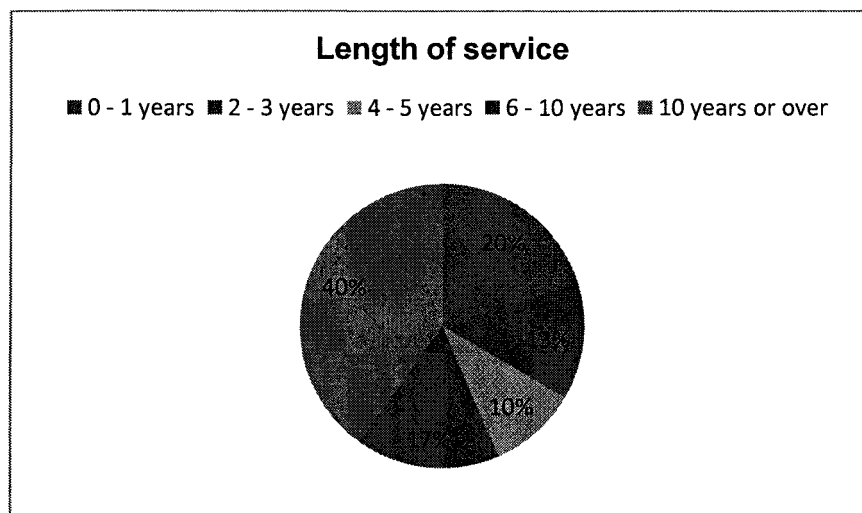


The demographics of the organisation's workforce not only set the scene, but can also be used to reflect on links with absence based research. Chapter Three provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on absence and demonstrates the links between a range of personal and organisational characteristics and levels of sickness absence. The workforce details allow a picture to build of whether employees at GMBC may be likely to have average or higher than average levels of absence, if applying existing research findings. This is important as it suggests that the workforce of GMBC, is to some extent, almost predisposed to have higher than average levels of absence, regardless of the way in which GMBC (and their FLMs) manage absence. Accordingly, when responding to the overall research question which guides this study, these external influences will need to be acknowledged.

Research by Barham and Begum (2005) indicates that female employees are absent more often than their male colleagues. This implies that GMBC may have potentially higher absence rates given their gender profile. In relation to age, Barham and Begum (2005) report that employees within the age category of 16-34 are likely to have the highest levels of absence. Considering the age profile of GMBC, which is highly skewed to those aged forty plus, this does not appear to be too big an issue. However, the findings shown in Cabinet Office (2004) are that employees aged 55-65 have the highest average number of days of absence.

Figure 4 presents the workforce's characteristics by looking at length of service within the organisation. This graph demonstrates that nearly one third of all employees have been working at GMBC for ten years or more. It is interesting to note that the second highest category was employees who have less than one year of service. This shows that there are peaks at both ends of the length of service scale, with the time periods in between being quite low. The high average length of service is consistent with the findings of Heap (2005) who found this was frequently the case in public sector organisations, and was much more prevalent than in their private sector counterparts. This may be partially explained by the age of the employees, and the fact that the vast majority are aged 35 or over.

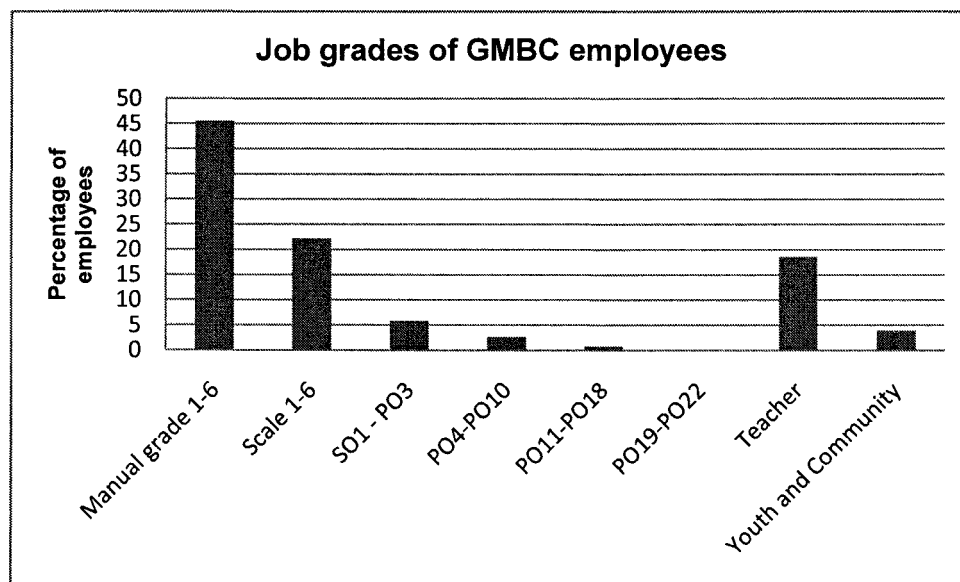
Figure 4 Length of service of GMBC employees



In terms of predictors of absence levels, work by Barham and Begum (2005) suggests that long-serving employees can potentially be immersed in an absence culture, whereby they believe that they have an entitlement to a period of absence. This may involve occasions where they are able to attend work but choose not to for various reasons.

The breakdown of GMBC's workforce by looking at the range of job grades of their employees is shown in Figure 5. This is relevant as a potential variable in absence behaviour as the Cabinet Office (2004) reported that levels of absence were higher for lower grades. Furthermore, they suggested that this might be attributable to the fact that reporting levels are likely to be higher at this level.

Figure 5 Job grades of GMBC employees



In addition it is interesting to look at two best value performance indicators (BVPI) which focus on workforce characteristics. BVPI 15 reports ill health retirements as a percentage of total workforce, this provides a sound indication of how successfully the organisation has been able to manage long term absences and facilitate returns to work. Due to the high costs of ill-health retirements to organisations, they actively aim to minimise this figure. The second relevant BVPI is 16A which looks at the percentage of staff with disabilities compared with the percentage of economically active disabled people in local authority area. This provides an indication of how successful the organisation has been in attracting and retaining disabled employees to exploit this sometimes underused talent pool.

The figures for these BVPI from 2004-2007 are shown in Table 1 where it is observed that GMBC has been successful in reducing its number of ill-health retirements over the three year period which will achieve significant cost savings. In addition, GMBC has been successful in nearly doubling the number of employees who have a disability which is another positive outcome for the organisation.

Table 1 Data for BVPIs 15 and 16A from 2004-07

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
BVPI 15	0.83%	0.6%	0.27%
BVPI 16A	0.78%	0.88%	1.53%

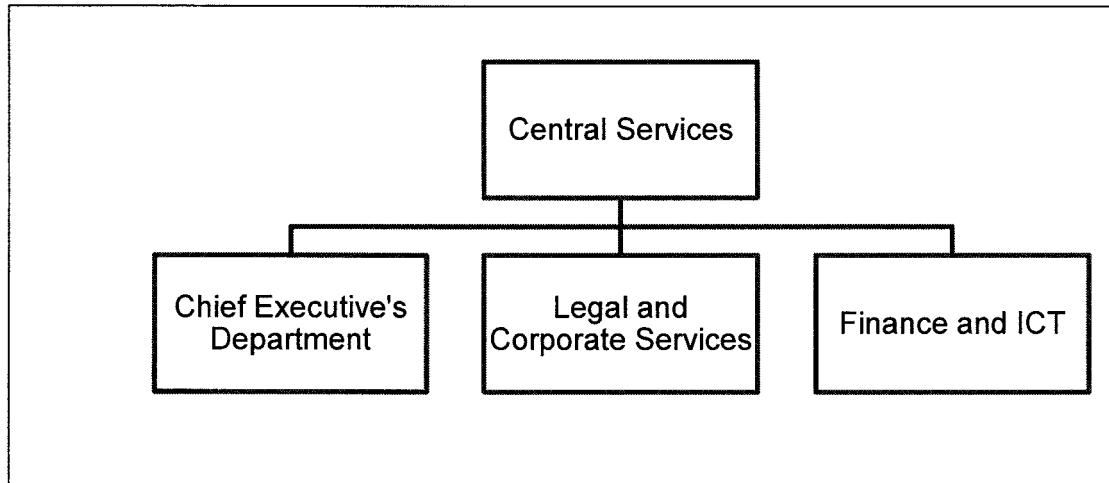
2.5. Introduction to hotspot divisions

As further detailed in Chapter Four, Research Framework, two divisions were chosen as the focus for this research; Central Services (CES) and Community Based Services (CBS). They were selected through the identification as the 'best' and 'worst' performing divisions, when looking only at their reported sickness absence levels. A brief introduction to both divisions, including their main functions is provided to set the scene for this research.

2.5.1. Central Services

The Central Services division provides the Council's support services, covering issues such as finance, legal, HR and policy. Some services support the work of the Council employees and elected members, whilst others are provided direct to the public. There are over 650 people employed within Central Services; 86% of these positions are full time, with the remaining 14% being part-time. The key areas within Central Services are shown overleaf in Figure 6 and demonstrate that the division is responsible for a range of professional services, most of which are office-based. This division was selected as a hotspot for this research as they have the best sickness absence record in GMBC; i.e. they have the lowest average number of days lost to sickness absence per employee per year.

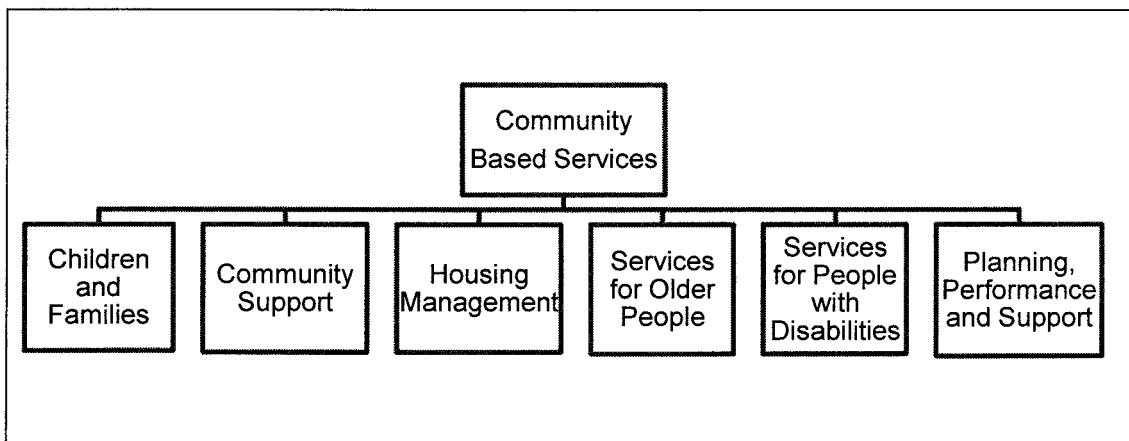
Figure 6 Organisation structure for Central Services Division



2.5.2. Community Based Services

This Service covers a diverse range of departments, and employs over 2,400 staff; 43.7% of staff work full time (38 hours), with the remaining 55.8% being part-time. The structure of the division is shown in Figure 7 and demonstrates the diversity of the areas and tasks that it is responsible for. This division was chosen as it has the worst sickness absence record in GMBC, i.e. it has the highest average number of days lost to sickness absence per employee per year.

Figure 7 Organisation structure for Community Based Services



2.6. Workforce characteristics in hotspot divisions

CES and CBS were chosen as they were the 'best' and 'worst' performing divisions in terms of levels of absence over the three year period under research. Table 2 and Table 3 show the profile of the employees from these divisions so that comparisons can be made between the two respective workforces.

Table 2 shows that CBS have 26.7% more female employees and this could have an impact upon absence levels as Voss et al. (2001) showed that women are more likely to be absent than men. There is also evidence that the average age range is significantly higher in CBS where 22% more employees are aged 40 and over. There is also more than double the amount of workers who are aged 50-59 and 60 and over. If the findings of Spurgeon et al. (2007) are applied, this may mean that CBS will have higher levels of absence because of the higher average age of their employees.

Table 2 Gender and age range of GMBC employees

	Gender			Age range						
	Male	Female	N/A	16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	N/A
CES	36.2%	56.4%	7.4%	2.2%	23.8%	28.1%	27.1%	16.5%	2.3%	0%
CBS	16.3%	83.1%	0.6%	0.8%	9.3%	21.2%	33.1%	30.4%	4.6%	0.6%

Table 3 provides the breakdown of the workforce by looking at the length of service of the employees and it is clear to see that the differences between the two divisions are less significant when using this variable. Therefore, this variable alone is probably unlikely to be able to explain the differences in absence levels between the two divisions.

Table 3 Lengths of service for GMBC employees

	Length of service (years)				
	0 - 1	2-3	4-5	6-10	10+
CES	21.6%	13.7%	10.3%	13.6%	37.7%
CBS	18.4%	10.1%	12.7%	22.6%	35.7%

When looking at pay grade (in Table 4), a very different picture emerges which perhaps demonstrates one of the key differences between the workforce composition of the two divisions. CBS has more than 20 times more employees who are on the manual pay grade (66.8% compared with only 3.4% in CES). There are also significantly less FLMS at the higher pay grades in CBS in comparison to CES. This reflects the nature of the jobs that are carried out in the two divisions and the fact that many of the CBS employees are classed as manual workers, whereas the majority of employees working in CES are in non-manual positions.

Table 4 Pay grades for GMBC employees

	Pay grades					
	Manual grade 1-6	Scale 1-6	SO1- PO3	PO4- PO10	PO11- PO18	PO19- PO22
CES	3.4%	55.8%	19.1%	13.4%	4.5%	0.6%
CBS	66.8%	21.7%	11.2%	3.38%	0%	0%

A large number of employees in the CBS division work in an area that was traditionally referred to as Adult Social Services, but has now been broken up into different areas. This more diverse spread of employees in this field may make it harder to track them as in the past they were all located in one discrete group. It is important to recognise this as research has shown that employees working in this area and other 'direct care services' may be absent more due to situational job-related variables (Balloch et al., 1995 and Seccombe, 1995).

One of these variables surrounds the nature of the potentially dangerous work environment of Social Care employees. Balloch et al's (1995) research showed that over 33.3% of their respondents had been attacked whilst carrying out their duties. Horder's (1999) research indicated that if work-related injuries or illnesses were excluded from the headline statistics the average amount of absence would be reduced significantly within this type of department.

Employers Organisation (2005a:21) stated: *"Social services functions persistently have higher rates of absence probably due to the stressful nature of work involved and their public facing role (particularly the care needed not to pass infections to frail clients)"*. Caverley et al. (2007:305) also believe that presenteeism (and potentially reduced productivity) can be influenced by job category and states: *"Jobs that provide services to people were more prone to sickness presenteeism than other occupations, because of a felt responsibility towards clients"*. In addition to stress as a reason for absence, Seccombe (1995) suggested that cross-infections between patients/clients and staff also exist within care-based roles which may have a direct impact on sickness absence levels.

According to CIPD (2008b) manual workers are absent more than non-manual employees which may be another contributory factor to CBS having a significantly higher level of absence. Levels of absence across the two divisions are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

2.7. Levels of absence

The introductory chapter provided a clear rationale for the importance of managing sickness absence, due to the high costs associated with it. In order to understand the research undertaken in this study, it is important to clarify the actual levels of absence at Gateshead Council over the three year period that this study focuses on. Absence levels used within this research are those provided as the BVPI figures, calculated using the Audit Commission formula that all Local Authorities must adhere to as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8 Performance indicator definition for BVPI 12: Working days lost to sickness absence (Source: Audit Commission, 2005 p.44)

Calculated as average number of days lost through sickness per employee (FTEs).

All relevant employees including teachers, where relevant, should be in the calculations.

For practical reasons and so that authorities are counting the same thing, days lost through sickness due to disability or long term illness should be included even if staff are not paid.

Absence due to industrial injury must be included. Where an employee reports sick part way through a working day/shift authorities should record the information to the nearest half-day/shift. To simplify calculations no deduction from working days lost should be made for leave that the staff concerned might be entitled to.

Table 5 shows the absence figures for the overall organisation from 2004-2007 where an interesting pattern can be observed. Between the financial year 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, absence levels were reduced in the organisation, however the absence rate increased again for 2006-2007, though it is still at a slightly lower rate than it was in 2004-2005. There are many possible reasons for this pattern such as the use of different absence management interventions between the periods, or any significant organisational events i.e. if there was uncertainty over jobs or budgets. Unfortunately GMBC could not provide evidence to explain these variances. A different explanation is offered by the Cabinet Office (2004) which suggests that when organisations actively focus on reducing absence, their statistics may appear to increase in the short term which is attributable to more accurate recording of absences (where absences may have been under-recorded in the past).

The variance in the absence data implies that interventions may have the potential to be able to impact absence levels, but looking at the figures alone does not provide any clues as to the intervention(s) that might have been used successfully. Information provided within the organisation's internal documents on absence (discussed further in Chapter 5) indicate that during this period a number of interventions were introduced such as careful monitoring of return-to-work interviews and monitoring of absence data. Unfortunately GMBC did not collect data before and after the introduction of these strategies and therefore it is not possible to attribute them accurately to reductions in absence levels.

Table 5 Levels of sickness absence at GMBC from 2004-2007

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-07
Gateshead	13.21	12.29	13.13

In comparison to national statistics, Table 5 shows that GMBC have a higher than average level of absence compared with the average of 6.7 days reported in CBI (2008) and the eight days as reported in CIPD (2008b). However, the 2006 external Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) report on GMBC (Audit Commission, 2006) provides some valuable contextual information on GMBC and confirms the organisation has provided evidence of introducing appropriate interventions to try to reduce levels of sickness absence:

The Council also leads by example and recently won the BBC's award as the region's healthiest employer. However, it has yet to have a significant impact on its own sickness levels which in 04/05 were in the worst 25% of Councils and affects the overall capacity of the Council to deliver its services. Audit Commission (2006:18)

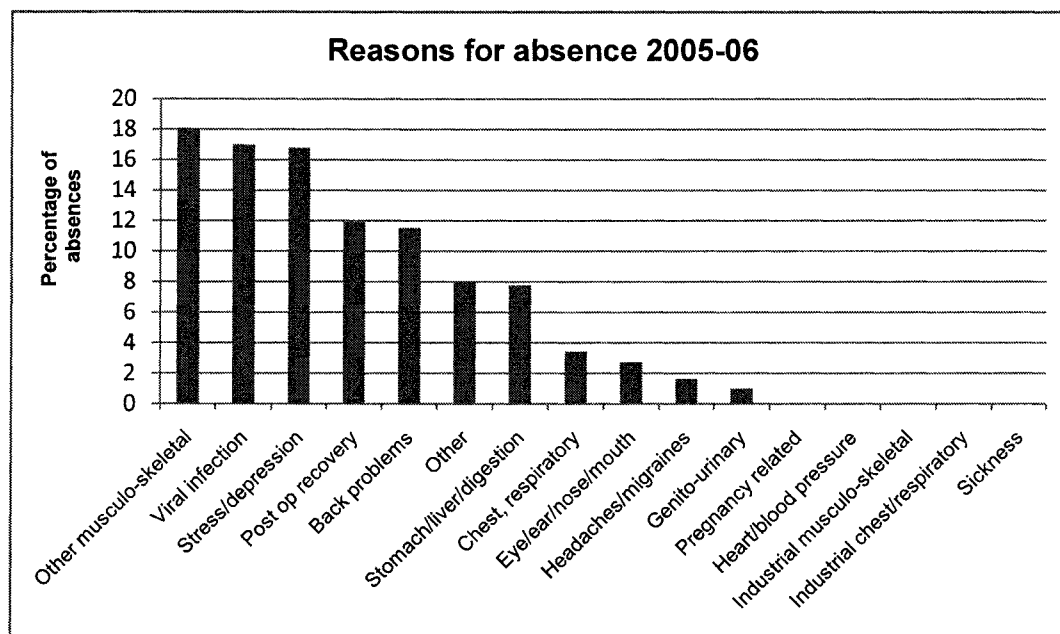
This externally generated report (Audit Commission, 2006) highlights the problem the organisation faces, whilst at the same time acknowledging their efforts in this area. Being in the lowest quartile of Councils in terms of performance is clearly a negative issue for the organisation and provides further justification for taking action in this area.

2.8. Reasons for absence in GMBC

The main purpose of this chapter is to understand the absence issues that GMBC are currently facing, and gather an accurate representation of their current situation. This study is not concerned with one particular type of absence (i.e. long term or short term absences) or absences for a specific reason, however in order to understand the situation the reasons for absence are presented. A limitation of the organisation's records is that they were unable to provide data at this level for the financial year 2004-2005. However, there is evidence to suggest that this limitation is not unusual in absence research whereby organisations cannot always fulfil all of the information requirements of researchers (Deery et al., 1995).

Figure 9 shows the reasons for absence provided for the financial year 2005-06 where it can be seen that the most frequently cited reason for absence was 'other musculo-skeletal', when added to the levels of incidence for 'back pain' it is clear that physical injuries are an issue. This is followed by the second and third most frequently cited reasons of stress and depression and viral infections.

Figure 9 Reasons for absence in the financial year 2005-2006

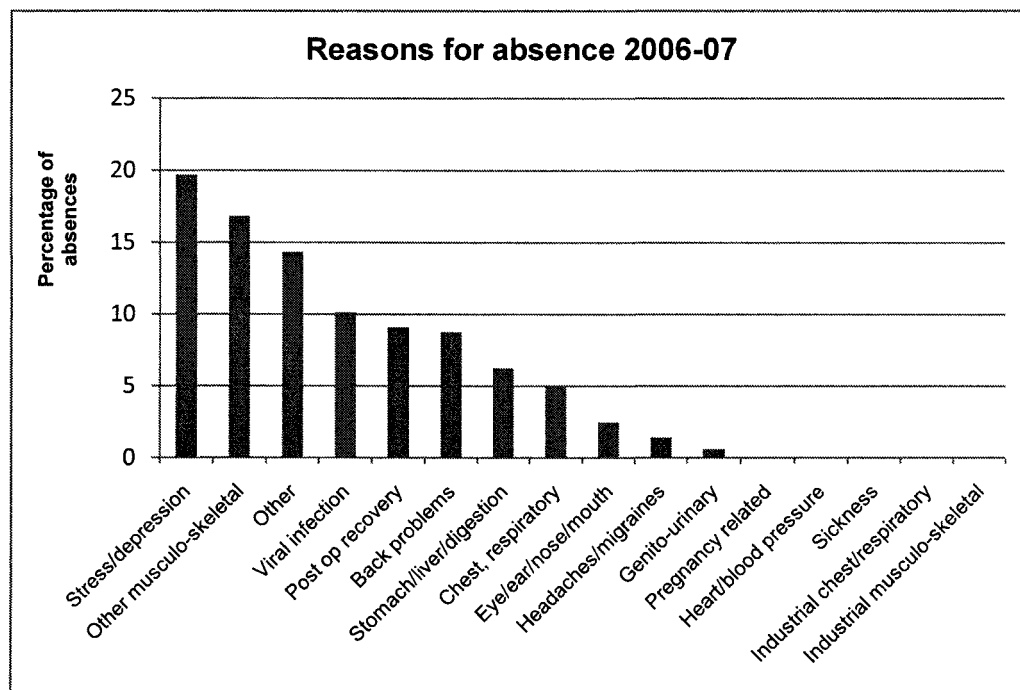


The absence data for the financial year 2006-07 is provided in Figure 10. This data shows an interesting trend, whereby the most frequently cited reason for absence was stress and depression. This is in line with national trends as reported in CIPD (2008a and 2008b) and CBI (2008) where levels of stress related absences are increasing.

It is believed that in part this may be due to work being carried out in organisations to reduce some of the stigmas associated with stress and mental health issues (Thomson et al., 2003). Therefore, in the past it is suggested that many stress related absences may have been classified differently either by the organisation or the individual employee.

Musculo-skeletal injuries continue to be a significant issue for the organisation, the extent of the issue is magnified further if this category is combined with the results of the 'back pain' category. It is particularly important for the organisation to focus on how they can prevent and reduce these types of injuries as they can potentially be very long term, with a significant proportion of employees unlikely to return to work.

Figure 10 Reasons for absence in the financial year 2006-2007



2.9. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities

The geographic position of Gateshead is thought to have an impact on absence levels as well as the breakdown of the local population as many of the employees live within the local area. It was therefore important to compare the absence levels against the performance of neighbouring local authorities.

Table 6 illustrates that Gateshead has the highest levels of sickness absence out of all of the North East Local Authorities and this has been consistent over the last three years. This could be attributed in part to contextual factors, including things such as levels of local unemployment, levels of general health in the area and scores on the deprivation index. It should not be assumed from the figures that Gateshead are the worst at managing sickness absence, as it is beyond the scope of this study to identify and investigate all of the possible direct and indirect variables. Using the BVPI data to provide these comparisons between absence levels should increase the reliability of this data as all of the organisations are required to use the same guidelines to calculate the average number of days lost over each one year period.

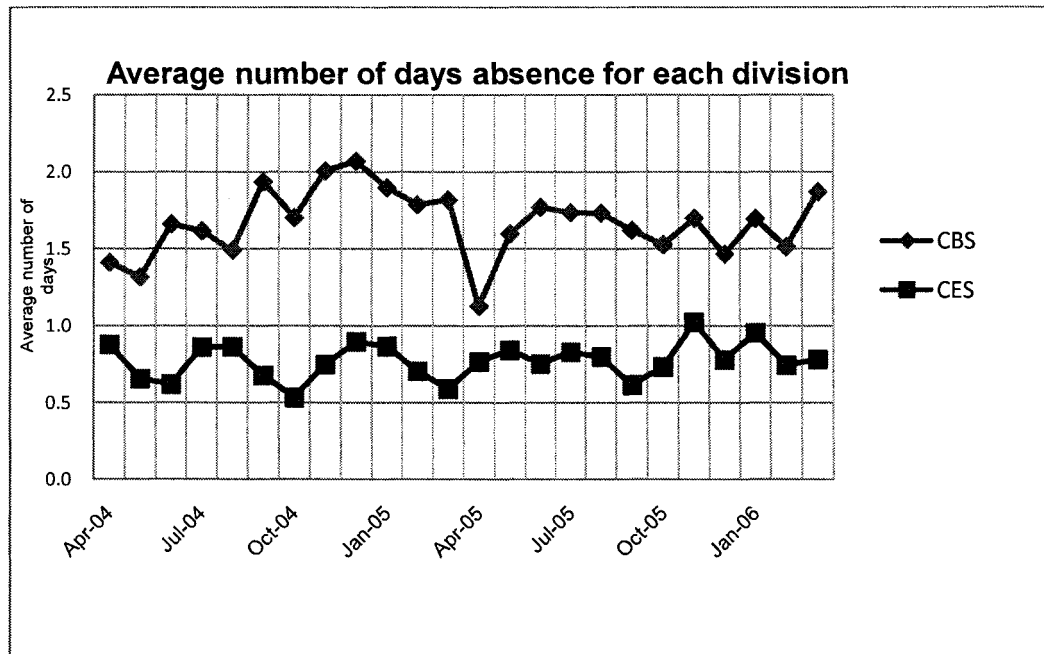
Table 6 Absence levels across North East Local Authorities from 2004-2007 (DCLG, 2008)

	BVPI 12 results: Average number of days absence		
	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-07
Gateshead	13.21	12.29	13.13
Newcastle	11.4	11.05	10.6
North Tyneside	12.9	12.48	12.12
South Tyneside	11.46	11.45	10.22
Northumberland	8.02	8.75	9.3
Durham	9.76	10.02	9.84
Sunderland	12.56	11.87	12.25

2.10. Sickness absence in the hotspot divisions

Over the three year period which is under investigation, Figure 11 confirms CBS consistently had higher levels of absence than its counterparts in CES which justifies their selection as hotspot divisions for this research. On a month by month basis there is a clear difference in the amount of absence in each division, this suggests that there is a systematic difference between the divisions. Figure 11 also demonstrates patterns in the levels of absence by identifying the months and years where absence levels increase and decrease substantially. When focusing on Central Services, it is observed that absence levels appear to be more constant over the three year period than Community Based Services where there are some noticeable peaks and troughs.

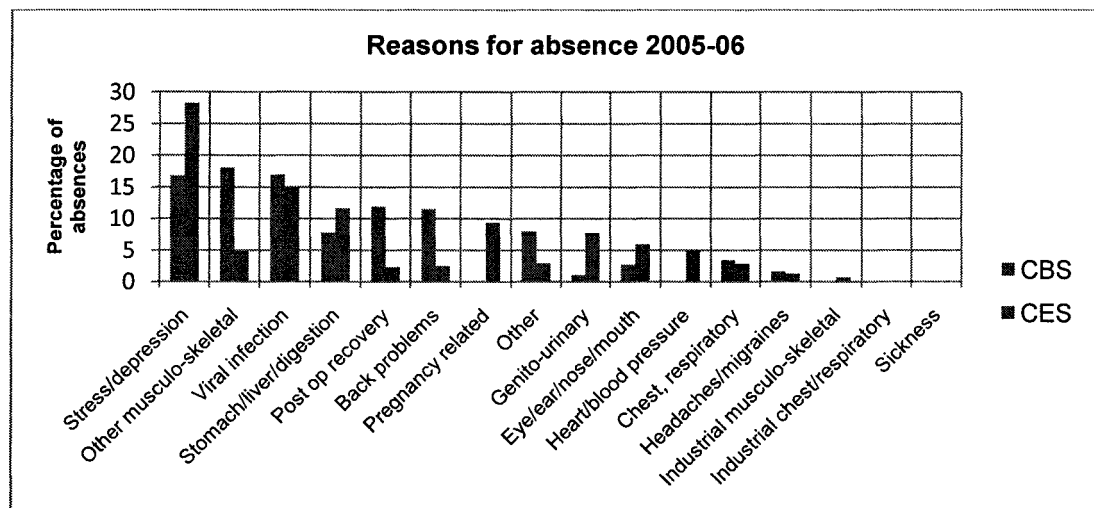
Figure 11 Average number of days of absence on a monthly basis in CBS and CES



The reported reasons for sickness absence can be broken down to divisional level, and the results for 2005-06 are shown in Figure 12. As the figures have been calculated as a percentage of all absences in each division, it enables us to make more meaningful comparisons between the two.

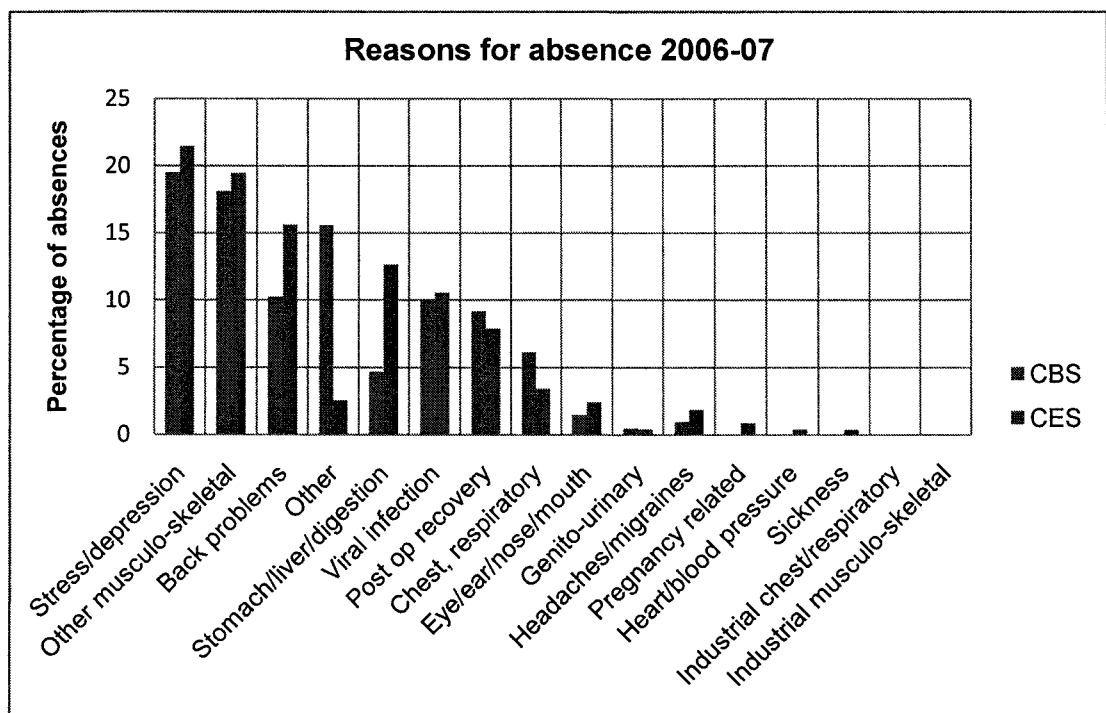
Figure 12 also demonstrates some interesting differences in the reasons for absence. In particular, absences due to stress and depression are much higher in CES whilst absences for 'other musculo-skeletal' are higher in CBS. These findings were expected due to the non-manual roles in CES compared to the predominantly manual roles undertaken in CBS. This is consistent with the findings of CIPD (2008b).

Figure 12 Reasons for absence in 2005-06



The data for the following financial year (2006-07) are shown in Figure 13 and whilst CES still have more reported absences due to stress, CBS' percentage of absences for this reason has increased. This is consistent with the findings of CIPD (2008b) who state that stress related illnesses are increasing across different types of jobs and organisations. It is also interesting to note that CES have increased levels of absence due to back pain, whilst the level of absence has reduced for CBS in this area. This may suggest that GMBC has offered a specific intervention to CBS employees who have historically incurred this sort of health problem.

Figure 13 Reasons for absence 2006-07



The data can be further broken down to Departmental level, and the results for CES in 2005-06 and 2006-07 are shown in Table 7 where some substantial differences are observed in the reasons for absence. For example, in 2006-07, 46.3% of absences in the HR Department were for 'other musculo-skeletal injuries', compared with much lower rates in the other three departments. Similarly, in 2005-06 absence for heart/blood pressure problems were very high in Legal and Corporate compared with the other divisions. When looking at the absence figures for stress and depression, an overall decrease can be seen in 2006-07 compared with the previous year.

A limitation of these figures is the lack of narrative available to explain why this might be the case. For example, it would be useful to know if the absent employees had been rehabilitated and have subsequently returned to work, or whether they may have left the organisation. When considering these figures, it is important to recognise CES is a fairly small division and therefore the figures could be distorted if a small number of employees had extended periods of absence.

Table 7 Reasons for absence in CES departments

	2005-06				2006-07			
	HR	Legal and Corporate	Finance and ICT	Chief Exec	HR	Legal and Corporate	Finance and ICT	Chief Exec
Back problems	0%	0%	8.5%	1.5%	0.2%	24.8%	11.7%	25.7%
Chest, respiratory	0%	5.5%	1.4%	4.4%	5.4%	1.4%	3.6%	3.2%
Eye/ear/nose/mouth/dental	0%	13.3%	2.9%	7.4%	1.4%	2.6%	4.3%	1.3%
Genito-urinary	28.3%	2.2%	0.3%	0%	0.3%	0.7%	0.4%	0.3%
Headaches/migraines	0%	0.6%	1.5%	2.9%	1.6%	2.8%	2.1%	0.9%
Other	0%	0%	11.6%	0%	5.7%	0%	4.2%	0.2%
Other musculo-skeletal injuries	9.4%	1.7%	5.4%	2.9%	46.3%	16.4%	12.1%	3.1%
Post op recovery and other hosp	0%	5.5%	3.9%	0%	1.6%	7.6%	7.2%	15.2%
Pregnancy related	0%	0%	0.4%	36.8%	0%	2.8%	0.5%	0%
Stomach/liver/digestion	1.9%	25.8%	11.7%	7.4%	11.5%	9.9%	11.3%	17.9%
Stress/depression/mental health	39.6%	1.7%	40.9%	30.9%	16%	17.7%	30.9%	21.3%
Viral infection	20.8%	21.6%	11.1%	5.9%	9.6%	12%	10.2%	10.4%
Heart/blood pressure	0%	19.4%	0.3%	0%	0.3%	0.9%	0%	0.3%
Industrial musculo-skeletal	0%	2.8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Industrial chest/respiratory	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.2%	0%	0%
Sickness	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1.4%	0%

A breakdown for the departments within CBS is shown in Table 8 and is followed by a discussion of the key findings from the comparisons of reasons for absence.

Table 8 Reasons for absence in CBS departments

	2005-2006						2006-2007					
	Children and Families	Community Support	Housing Management	Services for Older People	Services for People with Disabilities	Planning, Performance and Support	Children and Families	Community Support	Housing Management	Services for Older People	Services for People with Disabilities	Planning, Performance and Support
Back problems	9.6%	7%	24.5%	5.5%	4.7%	1%	6.2%	6.6%	7%	9.7%	7%	3.4%
Chest, respiratory	2.6%	9.4%	0.8%	3.7%	5.3%	6.8%	1.8%	17.9%	1.3%	8.2%	6.7%	3.3%
Eye/ear/nose/mouth/dental	1.3%	2.3%	4.2%	2.5%	1.7%	3.4%	1.9%	2.4%	7.2%	1.2%	1.6%	2.2%
Genito-urinary	0.4%	0.1%	0%	1.4%	0.2%	0.8%	0.9%	0.1%	1.1%	0.4%	1.2%	0.1%
Headaches/migraines	3.6%	1.2%	5.2%	1.7%	0.6%	2.8%	2%	1.3%	1.4%	0.5%	0.8%	2.1%
Other	13.8%	12.6%	6.6%	8.5%	21.6%	7.1%	20.4%	18.4%	8.6%	12.2%	18.5%	14.6%
Other musculo-skeletal injuries	8.4%	7.8%	8%	22.9%	8%	18.2%	11.5%	6.1%	1.7%	24.3%	14.9%	2%
Post op recovery and other hosp	8.5%	1.8%	14.6%	16.9%	12.3%	4.6%	6%	4.9%	28.5%	10.9%	11.7%	16.4%
Pregnancy related	0%	0.2%	4.6%	0.6%	0%	2.3%	0.7%	0%	0.9%	0.7%	0%	0.6%
Stomach/liver/digestion	12.3%	12.7%	2.3%	4.8%	5.5%	10.6%	9.6%	4.3%	1%	3.3%	3.8%	7.6%
Stress/depression/mental health	25.4%	31.8%	15.4%	19.7%	17.5%	22%	27%	26.2%	30.3%	18.2%	12.2%	27.9%
Viral infection	8.8%	12.7%	11.3%	9.1%	13.7%	19.5%	8.9%	9.3%	10.9%	8.2%	14.8%	19.4%
Heart/blood pressure	0.3%	0.3%	2.1%	1.8%	0.8%	0.5%	1.6%	0%	0.2%	0.8%	4.8%	0.1%
Industrial musculo-skeletal	2.1%	0%	0%	0.8%	7.8%	0%	0.1%	0%	0%	1.2%	1.4%	0%
Industrial chest/respiratory	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other industrial	2.6%	0%	0%	0%	0.2%	0%	1.3%	2.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sickness	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%	0%	0%	0.6%	0.5%

Table 8 demonstrates some interesting trends in the reasons provided for absence from work. For example; when looking at the levels of absence for stress/depression/mental health it can be seen that it has nearly doubled in the Housing Management Department (from 15.4%-30.3%) which is clearly a negative trend for the organisation. Conversely, absences for this reason have reduced in the Community Support Department and Services for People with Disabilities. This suggests that there may be differences in the way these conditions are being managed and supported in different departments.

Other negative trends include an increase in 'other musculo-skeletal injuries' in Services for Older People and a two-fold increase in absences recorded for the reason of 'chest/respiratory' in the Community Support Department. On the other hand, Housing Management has reported a vastly reduced level of absence for 'back problems' which has decreased from 24.5% to 7% over a one year period. A final observation is that there appears to be a large number of absences which are classified as 'other' this suggests that the organisation does not have access to accurate reasons; thereby affecting their ability to provide appropriate support to the absent employees.

A limitation of this research is that the organisation's information management system was unable to provide figures that could be drilled down to team level. This means that it is not possible to analyse whether there are trends in the reasons for absence in different areas of the organisation. This presents a potentially important limitation for the organisation as Cabinet Office (2004) is very clear about the importance of having detailed absence data. Comprehensive absence data allows the organisation to provide specifically tailored solutions within different sections of the business as well as enabling a more proactive approach.

2.11. Characteristics of absences

Earlier within this chapter, the demographics of GMBC's employees were presented alongside existing absence research to establish whether the demographics of the workforce could potentially explain their higher than average levels of absence. This section of the contextual data looks at the actual absence data to see if the expected associations with levels of absence appear.

Figure 14 breaks down levels of absence by the job grade of the absent employees where it can be seen the group with the highest level of absence is those on manual grades 1-6. This is consistent with the work of Cabinet Office (2004) who stated that absence levels decrease as job grade (and the associated seniority) increases.

Figure 14 Average number of days of absence by job grade

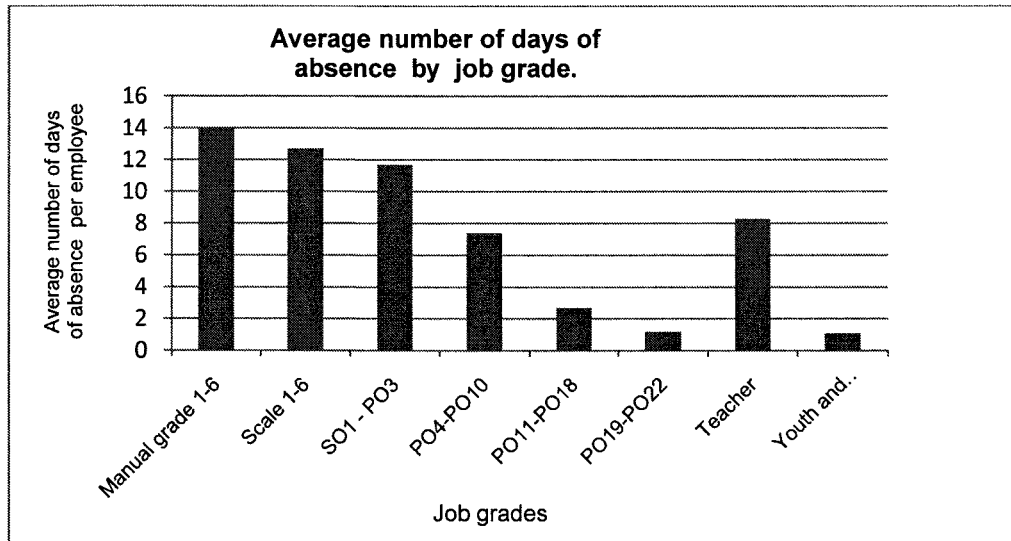
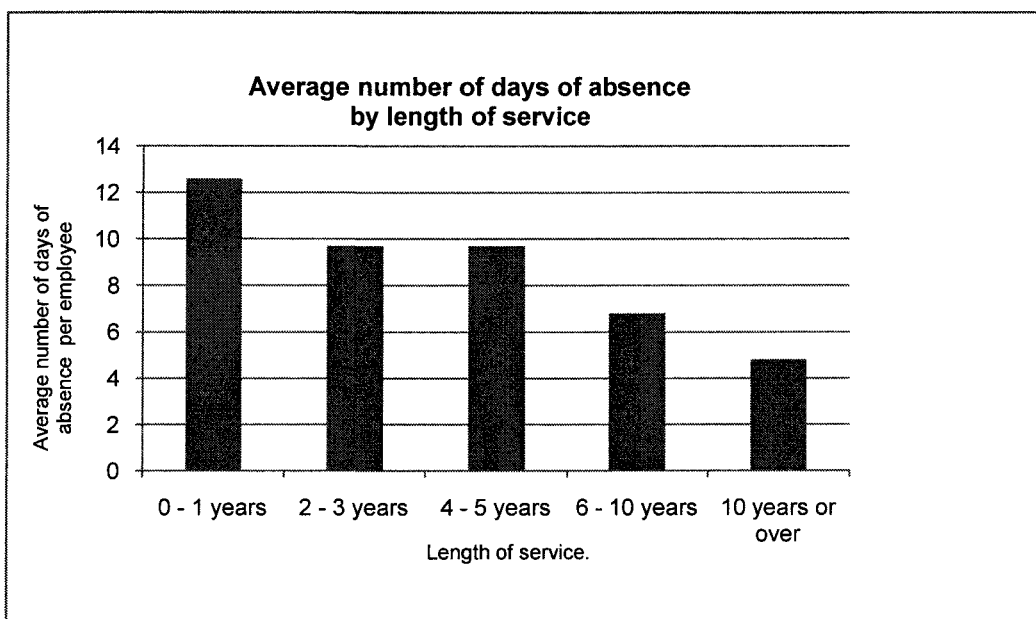


Figure 15 shows a clear pattern whereby the average number of days of absence decreases as length of service at GMBC increases, which is the opposite of the results predicted by Preston (1995). However, OPSC (2007) suggests research in this area is inconsistent and that it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions as there are potentially too many mitigating factors involved.

Figure 15 Average number of days of absence by length of service



2.12. Summary

This chapter has highlighted several characteristics of GMBC which may have an impact on sickness absence levels. This is important to recognise as it suggests there may be environmental factors outside of the control of the organisation.

However, there is also evidence of GMBC working to improve the general health of the people in the area as well as employees *“The Council is also working to improve the ‘wider determinants of health’ by raising educational attainment, improving housing and the environment and bringing jobs to local people”* (Audit Commission, 2006:27)

A limitation of this chapter is that the figures provided were supplied by the organisation and therefore it is not possible to assess their accuracy. This is a common dilemma when working with secondary data, as by definition, it was compiled for a different purpose (Cowton, 1998). All absence data held by organisations is potentially inaccurate as even where recorded properly it is possible that employees do not provide truthful information on reasons for absence (Employers Organisation, 2005b). Alternatively it may be the case that absences are not systematically recorded (Bevan et al., 2004); in addition, Employers Organisation (2005b) confirms that confusion often exists in organisations over how the absence of part-time staff should be recorded and measured.

A further limitation is in the breadth of information that the organisation had for the time period which was less than the optimum amount of data that would have been useful for the purpose of this Doctoral study. A changeover in the IT system also meant that past data could not be obtained in electronic form, meaning that the researcher could not manipulate the data and carry out different types of analysis on it.

The following chapter introduces the extant literature in the fields of absence management and the role of FLMs in organisations. Through this review, the contribution to knowledge of this study will be explored.

Chapter Three

Absence Management: The current theory base

3.1. Introduction

Chapter Two provided contextual information about GMBC and developed the rationale for this work. This chapter provides an overview of the key research which informs this study to address the research question: *What are the characteristics of FLMS required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?* The chapter aims to address the following research objective:

- To review literature in relation to the effective management of absence, and approaches in the public sector to establish a gap of existing knowledge.

In addition, a useful contribution is made to a further research objective through the exploration of methodologies used in existing studies:

- To design and implement an appropriate methodology and quantitative methods to investigate how FLMS can reduce absence.

The researcher's analysis of over 200 existing studies has confirmed a wide range of terminology is used in relation to absence. It is therefore appropriate to begin this review by clarifying terms and highlighting the approach taken within this study. Following on from this, it was necessary to define the parameters for this study clearly in order to be able to demonstrate their relevance towards answering the overall research question. The main body of this research encompasses two main subject areas: exploring the roles of FLMS; and investigating the concept of absence behaviours and 'effective' absence management. Within this chapter the role of FLMS is investigated and is followed by the review of extant research on absence behaviours and absence management.

The absence literature is discussed using five key themes that emerged from the current theory base; these issues are presented in detail before considering their applicability to FLMS in order to address the research question for this study. Using this structure facilitates the identification of the variables used to construct the key hypotheses and sub-hypotheses for this study which inform the subsequent research framework chapter.

3.2. Definition of key terms and measurement issues

3.2.1. Key terms relevant to absence research

When a concept has been interpreted and explored in different ways by previous researchers, it is necessary to understand these terms before clarifying the definitions which will be employed within this research. Johns (1978:435) defines absenteeism as *“the non-attendance of employees for scheduled work”*. This provides a fairly objective definition which does not make any implications about the reason for non-attendance. Later work by Edwards and Whitston (1989) suggests that there are more negative connotations associated with the word ‘absenteeism’ and that it is usually used in cases where the non-attendance at work is considered to be non-genuine. An example of this use is provided in the work of Lambert et al. (2005) however this is partially attributed to the nature of the industry: the prison service.

Alternative terminology and phrases are sometimes used to describe work in this area (Havergal, 1996): examples are ‘managing absence’ (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002) or ‘absence management’ (Dibben et al., 2001b). In many studies these terms are used interchangeably with no emphasis placed on whether negative connotations are being drawn from them. For example, in his review of the methodological diversity employed in studies in the field, Johns (2003) refers to ‘absenteeism’ throughout his work but includes the work of a range of authors who use different terminology.

A further complication in the use of terminology arises from the increasing use of the phrase ‘attendance management’ (e.g. in Bevan, 2003) which focuses on reducing levels of absence through focusing on encouraging people to attend work. The intention is that this is a more positive and proactive approach rather than using a more punitively driven approach where absences must be reduced (Howarth, 2005 and Investors in People, 2006). This terminology has been used in the work of such authors as Bevan (2003), Acas (2007) and Steel et al. (2007) where there is an increased emphasis on what organisations can do to encourage their employees to be motivated to attend work, and to be absent only when it is necessary due to ill health.

In order for this thesis to present a full picture in this area, it is also important to define another term which has been investigated in more contemporary research: the role of 'presenteeism'. Caverley al (2007:305) describe this as "*where employees are working less productively due to health or medical problems*" and provide examples of how this may manifest itself such as tension headaches and gastrointestinal problems. The authors believe that this is a significant issue for organisations and can have higher costs in terms of productivity than absenteeism, with the added complication that it is usually neither measured nor managed by organisations or FLMs. This supposition reinforces the conclusions of the earlier study undertaken by van Leeuwen et al. (2006) who stated that there was a large productivity loss from employees who attend work with chronic pain and are less effective at work as a consequence of their medical problems. When compiling statistics for Australian employees, van Leeuwen et al. demonstrated the potential impact of this problem by adjusting the total amount of productivity days that were lost in total:

Over a 12-month period there were AUD 1.4 billion lost through pain-related days absent alone, a figure which rose to AUD 5.1 billion when reduced-effectiveness workdays were included.

The focus of this study is on sickness related absence; therefore absences on other grounds such as maternity leave, time off for public duties and annual leave are not investigated. This is consistent with the way absence figures are calculated for the case study organisation (GMBC), using the formulae prescribed for the best value performance indicators (BVPI). The term 'managing absence' is used throughout this study.

Authors such as Steel (2003) believe categorising absence as either voluntary or involuntary is too crude due to the complexities and subjectivity involved. The work of Chadwick-Jones et al. (1971) suggests there is actually a continuum of employee choice. Voluntary absences occur when an employee makes the decision not to attend work when they are capable of doing so, conversely with involuntary absences the employee does not have a choice to make as they are unable to attend the workplace.

The nature of absence is that it is impossible for organisations to label absences accurately as being voluntary or involuntary (Leigh, 1986); this clearly provides a challenge for organisations as they need to know the cause to be able to deal with it appropriately (Cabinet Office, 2004). This can be explained by the fact that even when two people have the same symptoms of an illness, they may react in different ways whereby one person may attend work and the other may make the decision not to. Allegro and Veerman (1990) suggested a different way of categorising illness. They believe absences can be coded as white, grey or black, whereby a white absence occurs when someone is obviously ill, grey absences may be less visible and sometimes psychological/psychosomatic and black absences occur when someone reports in sick when there is nothing wrong with them. The objectives of this Doctoral study are not related to ensuring the appropriate classification of whether absences are genuine or not and the survey data analysis will rely on the levels of sickness absence of work teams reported by the FLM respondents.

Finally, the research question which this thesis answers makes reference to managing absence 'effectively', so it is important to clarify how this term has been defined by the researcher for the purpose of this study:

Managing absence by minimising non-genuine absences so employees are only absent when they are unable to attend; whilst at the same time, ensuring that genuinely absent employees receive appropriate levels of support in line with the organisation's policies and procedures.

This definition was created to reflect the fact that effective absence management is not about eliminating all periods of absence, as this would be neither legal nor desirable. In addition, the description also appears to be sympathetic to the views expressed by Rogers and Herting (1993) and James et al. (2002). From the perspective of FLMs this would involve making sure that all of their employees are aware of their obligations stemming from the organisation's absence management policy and adhere to them. At the same time, FLMs would be required to take action if employees abuse the absence policy. To manage absence effectively, FLMs would also need to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to apply the absence management policies and procedures consistently and give the organisation the best chance of minimising avoidable absences.

3.2.2. Measurement issues in absence research

Measuring absence is an interesting area to review as Durand (1985) found 41 different measures of absence have been reported. This diversity in calculations has also led to the production of studies focusing on the measurement issue e.g. Watson et al. (1985), Steel (2003) and Johns (2003) which is reviewed in more detail within section eight of this chapter. Normally when expressing levels of absence in specific sectors or organisations an average amount of sickness absence per employee per year is calculated. This is usually in the format of the average number of working days lost per employee and the average working time lost expressed as a percentage of working time.

Large scale studies such as CIPD (2008b) and CBI (2008) are undertaken on an annual basis in survey format, whereby questionnaires are distributed to HR professionals, however whilst CIPD (2008b) is a frequently used source when attempting to quantify levels of absence in the UK, there were only 811 respondents. These two surveys report on both measures of absence, but the headline figures are usually the number of days lost. Horder (1999) raises some objections to the use of 'headline figures', predominantly because they fail to emphasise the spread of absence within the organisation and in many cases a large percentage of employees have zero absences.

Chadwick Jones et al. (1971) and Ivancevich (1985) both argued that frequency of absence is a better measure of absence, particularly when there is a concentration on voluntary absences which are most likely to be short term. This remains a contemporary issue which has been explored by authors such as von Thiele et al. (2006) who established in their questionnaire to 1,726 employees in 48 Swedish dental clinics that it was frequency of absence which correlated most effectively with employee characteristics. It is suggested that one of the key reasons why frequency is a useful measure may be due to the figures being less affected by long term illness and not as prone to be skewed by outliers. However, Leigh (1986) argues a disadvantage of this measure is that they are less likely to reflect time lost due to illness as someone who had been absent for a period of weeks or months would only have a score of one which is not an accurate reflection.

From a practical perspective, IDS (2008) states that many organisations have taken an approach to measure absence which uses both total number of days of absence and number of occasions of absence. This is calculated using the Bradford factor scoring technique as the emphasis on frequency of absence reflects the fact that short-term, frequent absences are the most difficult for the organisation to deal with. This measuring tool is recommended by organisations such as CIPD and ACAS who many HR practitioners would consult as perceived sources of best practice. The method of calculating Bradford factor index scores is shown in Figure 16.

Figure 16 Calculation to generate Bradford factor scores as a measurement of sickness absence

Bradford factor score = $S \times S \times D$, where:
S = the number of absences (frequency); and
D = total number of days absent in any given period

Conversely, a review of contemporary academic studies from the last decade does not provide evidence of the Bradford factor approach being used by academic researchers. Perhaps this is attributable to the fact that many organisations are unlikely to be able to provide researchers with accurate statistics on both of these measures.

The work of Popp and Belohav (1982) reinforces the importance of using appropriate measures as within this quantitative study of 246 US-based refuse collectors, using the frequency measure increased total explained variance by 11% as opposed to the result when using the total number of days as the calculation.

When distinguishing in research between short term and long term absences there is also a risk of *criterion contamination* whereby within organisations the cause of absence (and whether it is voluntary or involuntary) may be classified wrongly (Steel, 2003). Even where the people responsible for recording absence do classify it appropriately, they are still depending on the employee to provide accurate information and in most cases there is no easy way to confirm a genuine reason is reported. Hammer and Landau (1981:575) expand on the different types of short term absence and believe it can take four forms as illustrated in Figure 17.

Whilst this is a useful tool it is unlikely organisations would be able to adopt it to categorise the absences of their employees.

Figure 17 Forms of short-term absence (Hammer and Landau, 1981)

Unnecessary voluntary withdrawal	Necessary voluntary withdrawal	Unnecessary involuntary withdrawal	Necessary involuntary withdrawal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers are able to attend work but make a conscious decision not to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The worker decided not to attend as part of a self-defense mechanism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The worker does have an illness/injury but would be able to attend work and chooses not to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The worker was unable to attend work because of illness/injury

3.3. Scope of the study

Durand (1985) believes absence studies can be divided into two paradigms: industrial/organisational and organisational behaviour management. It is important to emphasise this research study comes from the industrial/organisational paradigm using Durand's classifications as it is theoretically based and incorporates the use of a correlational research design.

There is clearly a vast amount of literature on the subject of absence, particularly because of its multi-disciplinary appeal. This is reflected in the number of different areas where material has been published including; health, sociology, psychology, economics, public policy, and education, in addition to the wide field of business management. It is therefore not practical or desirable to cover every aspect of absence and as such it was decided the boundaries for this research needed to be carefully scoped.

The implication of this far-reaching scope is that a number of absence-related concepts have been excluded from this chapter. This includes issues such as the links between levels of exercise taken by employees and their levels of sickness absence which was investigated by Altchiler and Motta (1994) and associations between the absence levels of employees and whether they smoke (Ault et al., 1991 and Lana et al., 2005). A further area of distinctiveness was uncovered in the work of Harrison and Price (2003) who looked at correlations between absenteeism at work and attendance at other 'behaviour settings'.

This omission of topic areas where absence research has been carried out is not intended to question their validity; they have been excluded as they will not contribute towards answering the research question posed in this study. A selection of the areas judged to be outside the scope of this study are reflected upon further in Chapter Seven as part of the recommendations for future research.

As this research has been clearly framed as coming from the management/ employer perspective, this chapter examines a range of critical factors which may affect an individual's motivation and ability to attend work with the desired outcome of minimising absence. After consideration of the available research it was also deemed appropriate to consider some of the group level absence issues such as relationships within the organisation and commitment to the organisation.

Work by Farrell and Stamm (1988:221) has indicated '*organization-wide and work environment factors*' are better predictors of absence than individual or demographic characteristics. This includes characteristics such as job satisfaction, organisation commitment and role tasks. In addition, it facilitates the discussion of absence cultures existing in organisations which remains a contemporary perspective (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998).

Bevan (2003:17) provides a useful definition and example of an absence culture:

A good deal of absence research shows a 'leniency' effect: that is, if employees perceive management to be indifferent to, or tolerant of, absence, then absence increases. This managerial leniency, together with what might be characterised as perceived 'malingering', can add to the view that an organisation has an absence culture.

Whilst evaluating potential causes or influences of employee absence is important in understanding the concept of managing absence as a whole; the overall desired outcome for this chapter is to focus on the first line managers and their characteristics in effectively managing absence. Accordingly, the reported reasons for absence are not explored in detail, nor is there a strong necessity to differentiate between genuine and perceived non-genuine absences.

Finally it is necessary to highlight the need for this review of the current theory base to utilise the full spectrum of international research. If the scope was limited only to UK-based literature there would be insufficient studies to evaluate as the majority of UK based research has been carried out by a small group of researchers (Bennett, Bevan, Cunningham, Dibben, Hayday, James, and McHugh). Whilst the use of international studies is a potential limitation of this study, it also presents an opportunity to make a significant contribution to develop the UK-based theory in absence management.

3.4. Introduction to FLMs

Before looking specifically at the concepts and theories surrounding managing absence, and focusing on the role played by FLMs in managing absence, it is useful to consider what the role of FLMs entails, and provide a brief historical overview. This is crucial when it can be demonstrated that the role has been fundamentally reorganised within the last decade. It will be shown that as a consequence of this reorganisation, a number of key responsibilities traditionally carried out by HR professionals, have now been devolved to line managers, and they often play the important role of 'gatekeeper' within their organisation (Bond and Wise, 2003:58).

The FLMs referred to in this Doctoral study are consistent with the definition discussed in Hutchinson and Purcell (2003:4):

Managers who are responsible for work group(s) to a higher level of management and who are placed in the lower levels of the management hierarchy, normally at the first level. They tended to have employees reporting to them who themselves did not have any management or supervisory responsibility and were responsible for the day-to-day running of their work area rather than strategic matters.

Alternate studies sometimes refer to FLMs as 'first tier managers' for example in the work of Peach Martins (2007). An overview of the important role FLMs play is described well by Gilmore et al. (1996:485):

Supervisors help employees define and understand the environment, and they may be the most salient source of information about the work environment.

Hales (2007:166) emphasises the impact that FLMs have in policy implementation, which is a key strand of this Doctoral research and reinforces the appropriateness of the research methods identified in Chapter Four:

The FLM role is the point at which organisational strategy and policy become real in that abstract managerial interventions and aspirations are transformed into operational realities in the form of concrete actions on the part of employees.

One of the conclusions of Purcell et al's (2003) report into understanding the people and performance link confirms the importance of the role of line managers and the importance of their role in implementing and enacting policies that can make a difference to performance levels in organisations. This was confirmed in their later research (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007:9) where they state:

The strong associations between leader behaviour and HR practices indicate the importance of FLMs in the enactment of HR practices.

Edwards (1982:2) contributes to this debate by stating:

What managers actually do, as distinct from what they think, will influence the nature of [absence] behaviour.

Purcell et al. (2003:75) develop this concept further and comment on the relationship between FLMs, their managers and HR in identifying a need for:

HR policies and practices to be designed for, focused-on, front line managers and on building a middle and upper tier that supports them.

Thinking specifically about absence management, this would require an involvement from FLMs at the policy consultation and design stage rather than just acting as implementers. As well as highlighting the importance of the role FLMs carry out, this also reinforces the need for adequate training and support to enable the FLMs to carry out their people management responsibilities correctly.

3.4.1. The devolution of HR responsibilities to FLMs

The wide-ranging literature which has evaluated the role of FLMs over the last decade consistently shows that the role appears to have changed significantly. Perhaps the most substantial change is the devolvement of many HR responsibilities to the FLMs (Bond and Wise, 2003).

Brewster and Larsen (2000:412) define devolvment as *“the degree to which HRM practice involves and gives responsibility to line managers rather than personnel specialists”*. Historically up-skilling and providing additional responsibilities to FLMs was not a common practice throughout the public sector though there are some exceptions such as the NHS where it became custom and practice that senior nurses would take on some line management responsibilities (Bolton, 2003).

In earlier research by Brewster and Larsen (2000) they identified several reasons why this may be the case such as: cost reduction; to provide a more comprehensive approach to HRM and to place the responsibility with the people who are closest to the employees. Renwick and MacNeil (2002) add to this list by emphasising the increasing need for decisions to be made in real time and the development of cost-centre approaches where budget holders need to be located within the smaller unit of the business.

When discussing generalist HR policies, Bond and Wise (2003:60) believe one of the principal reasons responsibilities have been devolved is decision making times could be shorter and *“consequently, issues and problems that arise can be resolved speedily before they escalate”* (McGuire et al., 2008: 79). Additional reasons include reduced costs (Suff, 1998 and Brewster and Larsen, 2000); to allow HR staff to work on more strategic issues (Budhwar, 2000 and Harris et al., 2002); a general aim of empowering appropriate levels of management (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995:10) and being able to use their more detailed knowledge of the context of their workplace (Kulik and Bainbridge, 2006). McGuire et al (2008) also believe that FLMs have a better appreciation of the workplace conditions and the types of interventions that could be used.

Despite Brewster and Larsen (2000) believing that FLMs are able to work more closely with their employees and are therefore better placed to manage and support them, it is ironic that the findings of Butterfield et al. (2005:358) discovered this change in role took them away from their team members:

Sergeants were in less-frequent contact with their constables than before, as they were confined more to their desks engaged in ‘fire-fighting’, routine paperwork and maintaining the computer record systems.

Whilst the context of policing is quite different to many other occupations there are mutually similar characteristics with many public sector workers who work on the front line with members of the public. Therefore, it was considered appropriate to reference this research.

Cunningham and Hyman (1995:6) describe devolution as FLMs being subjected to *“profound changes...emanating from HRM practices”* which was confirmed by the responses of 58% of their research participants. As these results were from a large research project which was carried out in Scotland with 45 establishments (who employed over 100,000 employees) in the format of a comprehensive 15 page questionnaire, these results are likely to have high validity. In addition to these reasons for devolving the responsibilities to FLMs, Renwick and MacNeil (2002) believe that the existence of more sophisticated technologies also supports the FLMs and means that they can be less reliant on dealing with HR staff.

Arroba and Wedgwood-Oppenheim (1994) suggest FLMs were traditionally promoted as they were highly competent in carrying out their jobs, not because of their potential for managerial competence. This may mean they are not sufficiently skilled to carry out some of their HR duties or may lack the confidence or knowledge. This devolvement to FLMs is a big change to both the structures of organisations as well as the FLMs themselves. Cunningham and Hyman (1995:10) describe this as being:

the supervisor could no longer be ‘the most skilled man’, they had to deal with person management issues, become ‘the facilitator’ and be the driving force behind change.

In many instances these changes were a huge culture shock, particularly in public sector organisations where in the past FLMs have not been in a position to make their own decisions and may even be described as being ‘risk averse’ (Harris, 1999). These far-ranging changes to the job roles of FLMs have been the subject of numerous research articles which have looked at different angles. There has been some work which states many FLMs are not always happy to take on these additional responsibilities as they do not feel that they have sufficient expertise in HR matters (Renwick, 2003).

Although there is little research available which has sought to directly explore the relationship between devolution of responsibilities and performance, one exception is the study by Perry and Kulik (2008). The authors carried out research in American organisations and established that *“respondents working in organizations where line manager involvement in people management had increased over the last five years rated the effectiveness of people management in their organization more positively”* (Perry and Kulik, 2008:269).

Organisations vary in the ways they use FLMs to carry out management functions, which is demonstrated in Figure 18 by identifying the roles allocated to the FLMs who were part of the relevant research studies. MacNeil (2003:295) tries to summarise the general trend in the devolvement of responsibilities by suggesting that :

A common theme in the HRM literature is that ‘operational’ or ‘transactional’ HRM activities are devolved to line managers, while HRM strategic decisions remain with the HRM specialists.

In addition Bredin and Soderlund (2007) emphasise the importance of considering the structure of the organisation and its complexity before deciding on the HR activities that could be devolved to the FLMs.

Figure 18 Summary of people management tasks undertaken by FLMs as evidenced in extant research

Research	Cunningham and Hyman (1995)	Butterfield et al. (2005)	Hales (2005)	Peach Martins (2007)
Context of research	45 organisations across Scotland 15 page questionnaire with an HR specialist from each organisation, followed by an interview	Carried out in an un-named Police service. Involved 50 interviews with different 'role sets' of employees	Carried out in 135 organisations in London and South East London Survey based	Case study from aerospace manufacturing/ engineering company. Semi-structured interviews and analysis of company documentation
Roles allocated to FLMs	Allocating individualised pay awards	Planning of work	Planning/ scheduling work	Training
	Appraisals	Deployment of teams	Setting priorities	Recruitment
	Training and development	Appraisal	Checking work against procedures	Discipline
	Motivating teams	Handling complaints	Giving advice	Absence management
	On the job coaching		Allocating work	Performance management

3.4.2. Challenges associated with FLMS carrying out HR responsibilities

A number of general disadvantages of FLMS undertaking people management roles have been identified from earlier research, including the fact that it may be more difficult for FLMS to know and understand the broader picture and the implications of some of their actions on the overall organisation (Larsen and Brewster, 2003). In addition, McGuire et al (2008:75) believe that FLMS can suffer from focusing too strongly on short term priorities, potentially at the expense of longer term development initiatives. This is partially attributable to the fact that most FLMS will have performance targets and they will see this as their principal accountability in the organisation (Renwick, 2003). On the other hand if performance is linked to reward this places an added incentive for FLMS to focus on short term performance issues (Goodhew et al., 2008). However, there is a potential risk in not dealing with absence on a daily basis as it may mean that initially simple issues can escalate. For example if return-to-work interviews are not carried out due to the time pressures, the employee may not have the opportunity to discuss the problem with their FLM and subsequently they will not have the option of organisational support to try and prevent further episodes of absence.

Although the work of Perry and Kulik (2008:262) is based on their work with Australian organisations they reiterate the strategic importance of getting the devolution decisions correct when they state:

Organizations that adopt a devolution strategy are taking a big risk: They are placing responsibility for the 'care and feeding' of their most important assets (their employees) in the hands of managers who may have received little or no formal training in HR.

Hutchinson and Wood (1995) and Harris (2005) highlight the time implications where the roles of FLMS are increasing but no extra time is available. This means it is unlikely the FLMS will be able to dedicate sufficient time to performing their people management responsibilities to a high standard. Within the case study that was carried out in a manufacturing organisation, Peach Martins (2007) asserts that the performance of FLMS is affected heavily by levels of role ambiguity and where ambiguities exist, this can have a negative impact on both confidence and measurable performance.

An alternative perspective is offered by Cunningham and Hyman (1995 and 1999) who argue lack of time to carry out their allocated HRM responsibilities can actually be frustrating for the FLMs.

The research carried out by Renwick (2003:271) involved carrying out 40 interviews with FLMs across three organisations and established a variety of negative issues that were highlighted by the FLMs. These issues included *“Doing HR work dilutes the line’s generalist managerial focus”* as well as the perceived tensions between FLMs and HR when dealing with specific cases and issues. Renwick (2003:272) also summarised the feelings of many of the interviewees by stating *“the line have responsibility and accountability in HRM, but little authority”*.

From a different stakeholder perspective, Watson et al. (2007) found that it was also a frustration of strategic level managers that they did not have enough time to dedicate to the support of FLMs and their HR role. There are also tensions for FLMs in their need for consistent application of HR practices as work by McGovern et al. (1997) and Renwick (2003) proposes that lack of consistency between managers is a challenge for organisations.

In relation to managing absence, FLMs may encounter a dilemma between acting consistently whilst at the same time treating absent employees as individuals (Acas, 2006). This is confirmed in the work of Bond and McCracken (2005) which discovered managerial discretion was built into the HR policies in the four Scottish financial institutions where they conducted their case study research. It could be argued that organisations introduce an element of discretion into their policies to facilitate the FLMs in operationalising HR policies, however in some instances this can lead to inconsistent practices between managers or departments in the organisation. High levels of inconsistency can cause resentment between employees and may lead to negative implications for employee relations (Bond and McCracken, 2005) if personal opinions lead to biased (and potentially discriminatory) decisions from FLMs. This issue is further complicated by the growing amount of employment legislation that needs to be adhered to across HR practices (Harris et al., 2002). The causes of inconsistencies also need to be considered as Heraty and Morley (1995:34) comment: *“inconsistency may arise since line managers are often the object of, as well as the devisors and implementors of, the HR initiative”*.

In the findings of Butterfield et al. (2005) the respondents acknowledged their lack of competence and training and felt this had a negative impact on the way they carried out their duties. Bolton (2003:123) discusses the roles of nurse managers in the NHS and describes their roles as being “*full of conflict and contradictions*”. There are reports of resistance from some managers who could not see the benefits of this change (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995) and unwillingness to participate (Watson et al., 2007) which suggests some organisations are not successfully communicating all of the relevant information to the people concerned. In addition, McGovern et al. (1997) and Bunning (2000) identified evidence of inconsistency and reduced quality in HR practices when FLMs took on the responsibility for managing them.

Cunningham and Hyman (1999:11) reflect on the possible implications for HR when many of the HR tasks are devolved to the line and suggest there are both optimistic and pessimistic hypotheses. From an ‘optimistic’ standpoint, they argue that it is an opportunity for HR to concentrate on more strategic matters:

Shorn of the burdensome toll of conducting routine techniques traditionally associated with personnel... the function will be liberated to concentrate upon strategic issues associated with a personnel metamorphosis to HRM.

The alternative ‘pessimistic’ viewpoint is that it weakens the argument about HR being at the top table and may make it more difficult to measure their contribution to the organisation.

3.4.3. The role of FLMs: moving forwards

The previous section of this review of the literature has highlighted that whilst there are advantages for organisations in devolving aspects of their HR practices to FLMs, a series of potential challenges were also identified. Despite these challenges, contemporary work by Peach Martins (2007) suggests that this trend of devolution is unlikely to change drastically in the near future. It seems obvious that researchers and organisations need to address some of these potential challenges to support the needs of the FLMs and try to gain the maximum advantage of them carrying out their roles. This applies to general HR practices as well as the specific issues related to absence management which forms the focus of this Doctoral study.

Peach Martins (2007: 636) suggests FLMs require “*explicit but flexible role/job descriptions*” so these positions at the first line level are filled appropriately. This highlights the importance of formally recognising that people management activities are part of the role played by FLMs. Authors such as Bunning (2000:101) appear to have taken a slightly different perspective by stressing the need to “*reflect the predominant accountability as the successful leadership of employees*” within job descriptions rather than simply technical competences; and suggest that this may help the FLMs to take on a more managerial rather than technical role.

Moving on from the contents of job descriptions, there is evidence in the research of Duffield et al. (2001) that the professionalisation of FLMs is beginning to emerge more tangibly. Although their research was conducted in Australia with first line nurse managers, their research design of replicating a survey after a decade (1989 - 1999) provides some interesting insights. Duffield et al. (2001) established that significantly more of the FLMs were now professionally qualified, and an increased number of the respondents had aspirations for more senior management positions in the future. This suggests that progress is being made in some contexts, though this is not necessarily generalisable across other countries and public sector organisations. The work of Duffield et al. (2001) also suggests that the context has developed significantly over the last two decades. In the past it was argued that there was regularly a lack of future career opportunities as the leap to middle management was often considered to be too high. Veiga (1981:567) discussed this leap within his article on “*plateaued and non-plateaued*” managers whereby the plateaus are described as “*the eternal pessimists, have long decided to stay put*” and this can have an impact on the culture within the organisation and the FLMs’ propensity to develop their skills further. The increased opportunities that are now available for FLMs to progress may eventually lead to a different profile of employees who apply to be FLMs and then have aspirations for future progression.

Earlier research carried out with the employees who participated in the case study work of Thornhill and Saunders (1998) also provided evidence of FLMs becoming more competent with the ‘management’ aspect of their role. This infers that progress is being made. Despite this progress it is clear that training for FLMs remains a crucial issue (Watson and Maxwell, 2007 and Bach, 2000).

The work of Cunningham and Hyman (1999) is particularly interesting as it suggests that the preference of many FLMs is for experiential learning. This provides a challenge to HR as it is more difficult for them to manage and monitor this type of training and also raises the issue of consistency if FLMs have not followed a standard programme.

Whilst the work of Perry and Kulik (2008) established that devolution benefits people management, further work is needed to gain an understanding of why and how this is the case so that maximum returns can be gained. In addition, although evidence from extant research suggests that the accountability of FLMs is becoming more formally assessed in some organisations the work of Budhwar (2000:154) is also clear that devolvment continues to have a need for “*strict HR auditing*”.

Now that the context has been set in terms of understanding the role of FLMs and an overview of the process of devolution, it is appropriate to focus on the subject that is being applied to the FLMs in this research: managing sickness absence. This is achieved by providing an overview of absence management in the UK, followed by specific insights into how absence is managed in the public sector as this is the context in which the empirical research for this study is located.

3.5. Employee absence in the UK: An introduction

3.5.1. The overall picture

Absence is an area which impacts on all organisations regardless of sector or size. It is difficult to quantify a cost to organisations although the CBI (2008) reports the annual cost to employers is £13.2 billion, an average cost of £537 per employee per year. The results from the latest annual CIPD absence survey (CIPD, 2008b) found the average cost of absence for their respondents was £666 per employee per year. Although this seems to be a high figure, it is only an increase of nine pounds from the previous survey (CIPD, 2007b). In addition to these direct costs resulting from employee absences, researchers such as Keller (1984) also have evidence that low performing employees with high levels of absenteeism are more likely to leave the organisation thus increasing turnover rates; therefore there are potential double cost implications.

However, these figures do not allow for the less tangible costs such as impact on colleagues and managers, time taken to recruit and train replacements, and potential reduction in quality and quantity of outputs which can all have an impact on organisations (McHugh, 2001). Johnson et al. (2003) add to this list by identifying lower morale and loss of valuable skills and experiences and Harvey et al. (1983:218) adds the cost of *"maintaining and administering an absence control program"* to this list. Levin and Kleiner (1992) also identify the inconvenience to FLMs in having to make alternative arrangements or perhaps having to carry out the duties of the absent employee themselves.

In extreme cases there may be a loss of service provision where standards or staff ratios cannot be met (NAO, 2006) or mandatory overtime for fellow workers (Lambert et al., 2005). This suggests the total cost of absence is likely to be significantly higher. Conley and Baggett's (1990:347) public sector based research identified an additional sector-specific cost; service delays may *"reinforce the public's somewhat negative image of civil servants"*. Looking at the national scale (CIPD, 2008b), a range of interesting patterns emerged, as absence can be analysed by sector, size of workforce and geographical region. When discussing a selection of the outcomes of this CIPD research it is necessary to highlight the sample size and response rate. In total 13,362 surveys were distributed but only 811 replies were received, which is a response rate of 6%. Nevertheless, the annual CIPD survey remains one of the key measures used within UK-based research on sickness absence. Geographically, respondents from the West Midlands reported the highest levels of absence at 9.5 days per employee which is 3.5 days higher than the best performing area which was London.

3.5.2. Reasons for absence

The causes of employee absence have been published in a variety of reports and are usually downloaded from organisational absence records rather than merely asking the opinion of HR practitioners. Reasons for absence from work are usually split into categories, short and long term absences, however there is some disparity between the classifications for the two sectors. There is a belief that long term absence is most likely to be associated with medical problems (Johnson et al., 2003 and James et al., 2002) as employees are required to provide medical certificates.

Long term sickness absence is a particular problem in the public sector and has been increasing at a steady rate in recent years (Cabinet Office, 2004). This may be partly explained by the more generous sick leave entitlement which is available to public sector workers. Cabinet Office (2004) suggests too many public sector organisations have employees who have been on *very long term sickness absence* which is defined as being six months or more. The main health reasons for long term absence are stated as being acute medical conditions, followed by back pain, musculoskeletal conditions, stress and mental health problems in CIPD (2008b:3). Manual workers in the public sector are 30.3% more likely to state stress as a leading cause of long term absence than their private sector colleagues, and 30.9% more likely to cite musculo-skeletal injuries. This pattern is consistent when looking at non-manual workers, where in the public sector they are 27.8% more likely to cite musculo-skeletal injuries and 30.8% more likely to cite stress than their private sector colleagues. Unfortunately neither CBI (2008) or CIPD (2008b) split the data according to whether the absences are work-related or not.

There is more published research available on short-term absences, probably because this is considered to be the most realistic for organisations to have an impact on through the use of interventions (Notenbomer et al., 2006). Research by Nice and Thornton (2004) insinuates that this has led to an unfair assumption that all short absences are non-genuine as they do not require medical certification. Perhaps Sanders (2004:151) takes the fairest approach in emphasising that a number of employees may have a short-term absence as they have made a quick recovery from illness and this could be as a sign of their motivation to work. For example; other employees who were absent with the same condition may have taken longer than necessary before they returned. According to CIPD (2008b:3) the most commonly reported reason for short term absence is 'minor illness' where the category is defined as "*colds/flu/stomach upsets/headaches and migraines*".

Absence can never be eradicated as ill health and diseases are inevitable (Luz and Green, 1997 and Johnson et al. 2003) and in many cases it is undesirable for employees to attend work when they are unwell as they may spread their illness to other people. An alternative perspective is that sometimes absence can be used as a coping mechanism whereby employees need to take a break from the work

environment, as was the case in the quantitative research on 54 hospital nurses conducted by Hackett and Bycio (1996:334) who concluded:

By staying away it appears they wrestled control over what might have become intolerable levels of physical and/or emotional fatigue.

Another example is provided in the work of Kristensen (1991) though this is likely to be partially explained by the context of the research: employees working in a Danish slaughterhouse and the working conditions. There may be advantages to the absent employees upon their return such as increased motivation and commitment, and higher productivity (Bycio, 1992). From an organisational perspective it is essential they are realistic when managing absence and setting targets (Cabinet Office, 2004). Work by Hayday (2006:1) also reinforces the importance of achieving balance between supporting genuinely ill employees whilst trying to prevent avoidable absences by stating:

Alongside handling genuine illness in a positive manner, co-ordinated measures are needed to discourage non-legitimate absence.

3.5.3. Absence management in the UK public sector

Absence management has been identified as an important issue for public sector organisations and this is substantiated by a series of recent reports and investigations (Cabinet Office, 2004; HSE, 2005, 2006; and National Audit Office, 2004a, 2004b and 2006). This is emphasised by the implementation of a Ministerial Task Force on absence (Cabinet Office, 2004) which has several required outcomes and deliverables. This includes the new requirement for attendance management to be a compulsory section in annual reports produced by agencies from 2005-06 onwards (Cabinet Office, 2005). There are many pressures on Local Authorities to reduce their levels of absence significantly. Gershon's (2004) report tasks Local Authorities to achieve over £20 billion of efficiencies in public spending by 2007-2008.

Reducing levels of absence would clearly be one way in which considerable savings could be made. There is pressure on Local Authorities to continuously seek to improve their performance indicators, which has been increased further by the provision of the package of 'freedom and flexibilities' which removes some central controls to enable Local Authorities to have more flexibility when they perform well, which was introduced in 2002 (DCLG, 2008).

The external and internal pressures placed on the organisations and their managers have led to criticisms that some public sector organisations are too focused on simply reducing their statistics rather than looking to solve the problems (Horder, 1999). This suggests holistic and supportive approaches are not the priority.

3.5.4. Comparing absence levels between the public and private sectors

Absence levels in the public sector are consistently higher than their private sector counterparts (CBI, 2007) though figures differ slightly between studies, depending on sample sizes. CIPD (2008b) states the average number of days lost per employee to be eight days which is equivalent to losing 3.5% of available working time. This translates to a difference between sectors to be the equivalent of 2.6 days, though HSE (2005) has suggested in earlier research that private sector organisations may be less rigorous in the recording of absence which may mean the actual gap between them is less pronounced.

To put this difference in absence levels into context, CBI (2007) estimates if public sector absence levels could be reduced to the same level as their private sector counterparts, a saving of £1.1 billion per year could be achieved in addition to the less tangible costs. However, HSE (2005) has explored the perceived differences in more detail and suggests that the headline figures provided by organisations such as CBI are misleading. This is based on the premise that the absence figures should take into account the size of the organisation and the difference in demographic profiles. After performing these standardisations, HSE (2005) believe public sector employees only take an average of 0.3 days more sickness absence per year than their private sector counterparts which is significantly less than CBI (2008).

In addition, findings by CIPD (2008b) demonstrate a wide variation in average absence levels between different services in the public sector. The worst performing area was Health who lost 11.7 days per year and the best performing being the respondents from Education who lost an average of 7.8 days per employee per year.

At a macro level there is clearly a range of distinctions between the UK public and private sectors. This section of the review concentrates on a discussion of some of the unique characteristics of the public sector. A multitude of studies reflect on the complex nature of the public sector which is predominantly attributable to the number of stakeholders involved; further complicated by competing and conflicting objectives (Brookfield, 2000); emphasis on value for money and accountability (McHugh and Brennan, 1994); an uncertain regulatory environment (Valle, 1999) and increased permeability (Boyne, 2002). Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2006:293) summarise the work of many researchers in highlighting recent changes to public sector organisations:

The UK public sector is reeling from the barrage of new initiatives with respect to the government's modernisation agenda, and a plethora of targets.

Before introducing the debate on how absence differs between the sectors, it is necessary to provide some context on how management practices vary between the sectors.

A large element of this debate surrounds the range of perspectives aired on the subject of new public management (NPM) which is described by Ferlie et al. (1996) as being about '*managers, markets and measurements*'. It is considered NPM has led to a large move away from some of the traditional public sector practices and values (Butterfield et al., 2005), including the transition from a strict hierarchy of power to a more devolutionised system and a move from standardisation to flexibility (Boyne et al., 1999). The introduction of NPM has been accompanied by a strong emphasis on providing value for money which is achieved via a number of different accounting and accountability procedures (Butterfield et al., 2005).

Commentaries in this area (e.g. in the work of Ferlie et al., 1996 and Skalen, 2004) consistently suggest NPM involves transferring private sector style management techniques into public sector organisations. However there remain a number of critiques to this approach. Boyne (2002:98) summarises this effectively by stating:

If public and private organisations are fundamentally different, there is little point in seeking to draw lessons from management in the private sector.

In relation to this present study, the work of Kitchener et al. (2000) appears important in providing some contextual information. Their research demonstrates Social Services employees (who are the largest group of respondents in this Doctoral research) continue to exhibit different line management behaviours in comparison to other public sector workers. This is evidenced by Kitchener et al. (2000:234) who state:

what stands out is the resilience of traditional patterns of custodial supervision, despite over a decade of central government guidance on management reform.

Custodial supervision refers to a mode of management style whereby managers are highly involved in operational matters, often at the expense of more strategic areas and consider their role to be focused on supporting staff rather than 'managing' and analysing their performance (Butterfield et al., 2005). In the context of working in Social Services Departments, Kitchener et al. (2000:218) define an additional characteristic as being the high levels of ambiguity managers have over the management/supervision aspect of their role, this may be compounded by the fact that many of them have previous experience in a non-management role within the care setting they now have responsibility for.

3.5.5. Reasons for higher levels of absence in the public sector

Wooden (1990) proposes four key reasons why absenteeism levels may be higher in the public sector. Firstly he argues there is greater job security, and therefore repeated absences are considered unlikely to lead to dismissal. Secondly he suggests the demands of the job are fundamentally different because there are less competitive pressures, and this can lead to lower performance standards which may ultimately provide less pressure for employees to attend work. In addition, Wooden believes the more generous sick leave entitlements and the perception of widespread lower levels of job satisfaction may also have an impact.

Vandenheuvel (1994) adds to this list by suggesting that the high percentage of trade union members is also an influence, as this variable correlates with higher average levels of absence. The nature of many of these variables suggests it is 'easier' for employees in this sector to take time off for non-genuine sickness absence with the knowledge they are less likely to be penalised.

Vandenheuvel (1994) also makes the interesting point that public sector organisations are more likely to employ practices which are usually associated with reducing absence but this has not led to actual reductions in absence level. There are clearly limitations in using the work of Wooden (1990) and Vandenheuvel (1994) as their research was published over 14 years ago, however these two authors remain heavily cited in contemporary research. For example, their work is featured in recent studies by Cunningham et al. (2006) and Lokke et al. (2007) when discussing sectoral differences in absence management. In addition, the two authors conducted their research within Australian organisations, and whilst on the surface there appear to be similarities, to compare them directly may be too simplistic. Whilst the overarching views of Wooden (1990) and Vandenheuvel (1994) may remain relevant it is important to reconsider their views on public sector job security.

Recent studies imply job security has reduced considerably in the public sector (Prowse and Prowse, 2007) due to factors such as the increase of fixed term contracts and the modernisation agenda so this must be borne in mind when contextualising the work of the two authors. These assertions are confirmed in the work of de Ruyter et al. (2008) who believe that the changes resulting from modernisation and structural changes have had a significant impact on job security which has led to an increased number of agency workers being employed. The work of de Ruyter et al. (2008) is particularly informative for this study as one of the groups they investigated were social care workers and the work identified several reasons why former employees were taking on agency roles. Overall, the reasons could all be linked to perceived job 'quality' as interviewees stated that their transfer was "*a reaction to deteriorating permanent job quality*" (de Ruyter et al., 2008:439) specific examples included; higher financial rewards, greater flexibility and a way to minimise personal stress levels.

Looking specifically at absence management, Cunningham et al. (2006:222) discuss the contradictions involved in managing absence in the public sector, whereby employees need to be supported whilst at the same time trying to encourage them not to be absent:

... a policy approach that emphasized the supportive treatment of those who were absent and an operational environment where considerable pressures

existed to reduce absence levels significantly in the short term, as well as to improve both efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Dibben et al's (2001a) research involved an exploratory survey which was completed by 300 employers (a 30% response rate) supplemented by follow-up interviews with 30 HR specialists from across the organisations. The research findings showed public sector organisations had access to a wider pool of medical experts (in addition to Occupational Health practitioners) than their private sector counterparts. This suggests they may be able to offer a more supportive service to their employees which may minimise lengths of absence.

The research by Dibben et al. (2001a) also concluded private sector organisations were making more use of their disciplinary policies to deal with absence cases. This may lead to generally lower absence levels as employees are aware of the possible consequences.

3.6. Linking the key concepts: The role of FLMs in managing absence

So far, this chapter has presented an overview of the key areas that are relevant to this Doctoral thesis. It is now appropriate to pull together the two key themes of FLMs and managing absence, by looking specifically at the role of FLMs in absence management.

A number of studies and research reports from the last five years have been clear about the important role played by FLMs in the managing absence process (Cunningham et al., 2006 and Cabinet Office, 2004). Whilst there appears to be undoubted agreement that FLMs are crucial, little detail is available on why this may be the case or whether they can actually have an impact on the absence levels of the employees they manage. Although one possible exception is Bennett (2002) who established that where FLMs are responsible for collecting absence information and then providing it to HR, better absence statistics were available which would clearly be beneficial for the organisation.

Figure 19 demonstrates some of the different roles carried out by FLMs in managing absence, and is adapted from three research studies. This is relevant to the present research context by highlighting the different roles played by FLMs in the managing absence process. These three sources are particularly relevant as they are all UK-based.

Figure 19 Roles carried out by FLMs in the managing absence process

Research	James et al. (2002)	Hayday (2006)	Hutchinson and Purcell (2003)
Roles carried out by FLMs in managing absence	Maintaining contact with absent employees	Conducting return-to-work interviews	Monitoring absence and lateness
	Facilitating the return to work of employees who have been absent	Monitoring absence levels	Maintaining contact with absent staff
		Initiating disciplinary action	Conducting return-to-work interviews
		Managing staff back into the workplace	Counselling staff
			Conducting disciplinary hearings

Johnson et al. (2003:340) believe: *“Successful strategies begin and persist with the genuine belief by management that something can be done to reduce absence”*. This suggests a particular mindset is required which would require the FLMs to buy-in to the concept of managing absence making a difference. If this mindset exists it is suggested that FLMs may have a greater understanding of why managing absence is so important, and then they may spend more time on it.

The need for FLMs to have clarity in their role is reported consistently throughout the literature including the work of researchers such as Rappe and Zwick (2007) and Hutchinson (2008) who argue that FLMs need to be very clear about what they are and are not responsible and accountable for. Previous work by McGovern et al. (1997:19) moves this forward as their work based in eight large UK-based organisations assumed that the role of FLMs should be explicit: *“formally institutionalised and reinforced through the organisation’s policies”* and investigated this through their research. This confirms that organisations should ensure that the roles are formally clarified to minimise any potential misunderstandings. Looking specifically at managing absence, this point has been confirmed in the research of Hayday (2007) and Robson (2007b).

An essential part of effective absence management involves strong co-operation between the stakeholders (i.e. employees, FLMs, HR and Occupational Health) as emphasised by Dibben et al. (2001a). When a number of stakeholders are involved, it becomes vital there is real clarity in roles and responsibilities (Cabinet Office, 2004) both on an operational and strategic level and research shows this is not always the case (Renwick, 2003). It is therefore essential that FLMs understand the areas in which they will be required to work with other stakeholders.

As FLMs have taken on the responsibility for managing absence this has led to a change in the functions performed by HR in this area. They are still likely to lead areas such as policy development and provision of training activities, but in day-to-day cases of managing absence they are more likely to take on an advisory role. In the case studies investigated in the work of James et al. (2002:87), HR also had a clear responsibility to *“ensure that policies were correctly interpreted and consistently applied by line managers”*. This change has a potential impact on FLMs as they will need to instigate a different type of relationship with HR. Peach Martins (2007) suggests HRM staff may have an ulterior motive for failing to support FLMs adequately, as there may be an element of fear about the rising number of up-skilled FLMs to the extent that fewer specialist HRM staff are needed.

3.7. The key foci of existing research into sickness absence

As absence management is clearly the overall focus of this thesis, it is important that the concept is investigated in detail so as to understand the context and complexities that surround it. The overall topic of managing absence can be conceptualised in different ways. Firstly, there is an abundance of research which aims to investigate why people are absent. This has been developed further by looking at historical absence data to look for patterns and relationships (e.g. the work of Garcia, 1987; Martocchio, 1989; and Lambert et al., 2005). Research then moved on to identifying determinants of absence by looking at a wide range of characteristics of both employees and organisations and developing models of absence behaviour (Nicholson, 1977; Steers and Rhodes, 1978; Brooke, 1986; Rhodes and Steers, 1990 and Martocchio and Judge, 1994).

More contemporary research focuses on how absence is managed in organisations; with reference to whether it is in line with good practice and contextual factors (including the work of Deery et al., 1995; Bennett, 2002; McHugh, 2002 and Johnson et al., 2003). All of these variables are explored within this section of the review.

“There is no simple explanation for absence; the cause may be simple, or multiple, complex and inter-related” (Johnson et al., 2003:338). This is confirmed by James, et al. (2002:83) who define it as being *“multidimensional”*. Employees are individuals and their motivation and ability to attend work will vary considerably. Even when employees suffer from ill-health this does not mean they are automatically incapable of attending work and carrying out all or a proportion of their tasks and responsibilities (Johnson et al., 2003). One of the criticisms of the current UK approach to sick notes is that it is a very black and white approach where employees are either fit or not fit to attend work and there is unlikely to be a compromise (Black, 2008). This issue is raised in the recent Government report entitled *‘Working for a healthier future’* where one of the recommendations is the provision of ‘well-notes’, where Doctors will be asked to focus on the areas of work which employees are fit for (Black, 2008). This appears to be a more positive approach and is potentially advantageous for both employees and employers.

The following sections (3.7.1 – 3.8) evaluate the key literature in the field of absence management (including the seminal models of absence behaviour) and integrate this with research on the characteristics required of FLMS to manage absence effectively. This enables the identification of the key variables which can be tested as hypotheses in line with the deductive nature of this Doctoral study.

The review of the extant literature in relation to managing absence and the characteristics of FLMS can be categorised into the following five different areas which will be explored in turn; personal characteristics; organisational characteristics; general work attitudes; knowledge of absence; and confidence in managing absence. This is achieved by providing an overview of the key studies, making reference to appropriate empirical work and considering the respective strengths and weaknesses. This is followed by looking at each variable in turn to consider the characteristics of FLMS ‘required’ to manage absence effectively.

3.7.1. Variables related to ‘personal characteristics’ and levels of sickness absence.

This section of the review commences by investigating the existing research which looks at associations between the personal characteristics of employees and levels of sickness absence. This is followed by an evaluation of the extant research covering the personal characteristics of FLMs and whether an association exists with levels of subordinate absence.

3.7.1.1. Variables related to the ‘personal characteristics’ of employees and levels of sickness absence.

A large proportion of research into sickness absence has focused on the personal characteristics of employees and the relationship with their absence history (Spencer and Steers, 1980). When looking at the demographic variables of absent employees for example, research has been consistent about gender, stating that women are absent more than men. Voss et al. (2001) found that women are absent more often than men (a sickness incidence rate of 52.2 compared to 46.1 for men) in their study of 3470 Swedish employees, which was also similar to the results of Barham and Leonard (2002) (3.8% of women had been absent in the research period compared to 3% of men) which was consistent with an earlier study on gender and absenteeism by Scott and McLellan (1990).

In addition to differences in the levels of absence between the genders, UK-based research by Harvey and Nicholson (1999) also hypothesised that there were differences in reasons for absence. Specifically they found that men legitimised several minor illnesses more than women, which was the opposite result to what would be expected from previous literature on absenteeism and gender. The issue of gender remains an interesting area as few explanations have been offered to date, though possible reasons offered by Mastekaasa (2000:1827) include the fact that women have increased responsibilities outside of the workplace:

Women to a greater extent than men are exposed to the ‘double burden’ of combining paid work with family obligations

Patton and Johns (2007) believe many research conclusions to date, such as increased absence for family responsibilities, have not been sufficiently empirically tested, and where research has been carried out, the findings are incomplete.

In addition, Patton and Johns (2007) believe there are too many stereotypes regarding the reasons for the absence of female employees. This is consistent with the earlier work of Erickson et al. (2000) which emphasised that the growing number of dual earner families was likely to mean that increasing numbers of men may have to take time off due to their family responsibilities.

In the last decade, there is evidence that both organisations and researchers have acknowledged that employees may have additional caring responsibilities in addition to looking after children; this is referred to as 'kinship' by Bevan (2003:20) who defines it as:

the extent to which employees have distinct and significant domestic care responsibilities for members of their close and immediate family.

Whilst there is no evidence of these additional factors being researched to date, it is anticipated that this gap will be addressed in future studies. A range of differing conclusions about levels of absence were also established for age (Martocchio, 1989; Hackett, 1990; Lambert et al., 2005); race (Garcia, 1987); and marital status (Barham and Begum, 2005). When looking at age Martocchio discovered that both types of absence that he investigated (voluntary and involuntary) were inversely related to age.

Hackett (1990) conducted a meta-analysis of studies published on age and employee absenteeism and concluded that there was evidence of a relationship, however the cross-sectional nature of the research design is a limitation of the work. Lambert et al. (2005) found that 'older' workers were absent more often than their younger colleagues, and the authors attributed this to increased physical pressures. However, the physically demanding environment of working in a prison is also likely to have been a factor. Similar results were reported by Rogers and Herting (1993) however, the environmental context of being based on a US naval base may also be a factor which should not be overlooked due to the likely pressures of the jobs involved.

Garcia (1987) investigated the variable of race when carrying out research in an organisation based in a large western US city (which was anonymised within the publication) and found a statistically significant association at the 1% level between the race of employees and their reported levels of absence. The results

showed that employees from ethnic minorities had higher levels of sickness absence than other groups of employees. Within his work, Garcia (1987) does not provide any possible explanations for this result and unfortunately this variable has not been investigated within more recent studies or UK-based research.

Barham and Begum (2005) investigated the variable of marital status in their analysis of statistics from the Labour Force Survey which collects data for a defined one week period, thereby offering an interesting perspective in comparison to the usual studies based over one year. The authors report that married respondents have less sickness absence than non-married lone parents. In an earlier piece of research looking at a range of demographics, Garcia (1987) did not find any relationships between marital status and levels of absence, however the data analysis did show that non-married employees were more likely to have zero absences over a one year period.

The author did not find any evidence of the variable of 'level of education' being evaluated within any of the recent UK-based research either by academics or within the plethora of best-practice focused literature or the statistics provided in the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Nevertheless, some results may be generalisable from studies carried out in other countries.

When looking at the prediction of absenteeism over a timeframe of 70 months in the US, level of education was one of the best predictors of future absenteeism (Steel and Rentsch, 1995). Garcia (1987) also conducted research in the USA and found employees who had a high school diploma as their highest educational achievement were more likely to be absent; with those who were University educated having lower levels of absence. These findings were replicated in a later study by Lambert et al. (2005) who also found that employees with a degree were less likely to be absent.

Few studies have looked at length of service of employees and absenteeism, however when this was investigated by Garcia (1987) he discovered employees with 21 years of service or more had the lowest level of total absence and also the highest levels of zero absence. In the context of employees working in the social care sector, Horder (1999:263) provides an anecdotal explanation of why FLMs may exhibit lower levels of sickness absence than their subordinates: "*Managers who control sickness absence are less exposed to the physical risks*".

Although this specific example of Horder (1999) may be context-based, it is suggested that this research may still be generalisable across other front-line delivery occupations where managers take on a more administratively based role.

Before analysing the quantitative statistics generated by the University of Michigan's Survey Research Centre (SRC) Leigh (1986:82) makes the simple yet important point *"some people, because of preventative care and genetic makeup, are more or less inclined to become ill or injured"*. This reinforces the fact that the organisation will not have access to every possible detail on their employees and therefore will never have the full picture. At the same time, it is likely that many of these factors cannot be controlled for. Despite the fact that there have been inconsistent findings when looking at the personal characteristics of absent employees it remains important to acknowledge the research base as Quick et al. (2007:197) reinforce that *"work and family (or non-work) roles are not separable"*. Farrell and Stamm (1988:222) state *"individualistic theories, especially those emphasizing age, sex and job satisfaction do not seem promising"*. This confirms the need to consider other characteristics and their associations with absence.

Concepts such as personality have also been investigated previously by authors such as Furnham and Miller (1997) as well as Martocchio and Jimeno (2003:23) who aimed to *"introduce the notion of absence as an affective event leading to functional or dysfunctional outcomes for the individual depending on personality"*. Whilst this individual study did not include empirical testing of the model, it raised several issues for how it could be tested in the future, but this variable is outside of the scope of this present study as it is not sufficiently aligned to the overall research question.

An interesting study with a sample of 121 technicians from an electronics firm was carried out by Ivancevich (1985); this research looked to establish whether or not prior absenteeism was related to future absenteeism when employees changed their roles within organisations. The results from this study showed a positive (significant) relationship between prior and subsequent levels of absenteeism over the two year period in which the research took place. This is a potentially very interesting variable for researchers as it may imply that prior absenteeism could be a selection variable. Unfortunately this particular study did not include employees who had been promoted within the organisation and therefore it cannot provide a specific insight relevant to the characteristics of FLMS.

The research into personal characteristics which has been explored in this section can be moved forwards to examine the personal characteristics of the FLMS to meet the objectives of this study. The following section investigates research which has been carried out on the personal characteristics of FLMS, thereby addressing the research question that guides this study.

3.7.1.2. Variables related to personal characteristics of FLMS and levels of sickness absence.

The work of Moore et al. (2005:88) is an innovative study that looks at the relationship between the gender of managers and health and wellbeing in order to test the following hypothesis: “Both *male and female managers working for a female supervisor will report more positive job experiences and higher indices of health and well-being*”. The results of this study were consistent with this hypothesis and established that the subordinates with female supervisors lower levels of depression and a lower number of work absences. Hales (2005) also hints that the gender of FLMS may impact on the way they manage their employees, so this is tested within the context of managing absence in this PhD study. In addition, Horder’s (1999) research was carried out in a Local Authority situated in London and he described tensions between the large percentage of females who were managed by male managers and suggested that this may have an impact; though he did not test this belief within the study. This present Doctoral study develops the concept of the importance of personal characteristics further by also looking at the age of the FLM as a variable to test whether an association exists with the levels of absence of the FLMS’ subordinates.

Since the empirical work of Metzner and Mann (1953) reported an association with length of service nearly fifty years ago, this variable has not been included frequently in research studies though there are some exceptions such as Drago and Wooden (1992); it was therefore included to test it in a more contemporary context. More recent research by Lambert et al. (2005:167) provided a possible explanation for why tenure is inversely related to absenteeism: “*Many organizations ‘weed out’ employees who take excessive sick leave*”. It was therefore hypothesised that within GMBC, levels of absence at FLM level would be lower than the organisational average because the age profile of this workforce is skewed at the higher end of the age continuum.

Another relevant study which may provide an insight is that of Judiesch and Lyness (1999) who found a significant relationship between the levels of leave of absence of managers and future career opportunities. This may prove to be a factor that is taken into account by managers which could influence their motivation to attend work, and prevent them from taking unnecessary periods of sickness absence.

Within a single organisation, the range of tasks of FLMs can be very diverse with differing job titles and scopes of responsibility (Hales, 2005); job grade was therefore added as a variable to see whether an association existed with the job grade of the FLMs and the absence levels of their subordinates. This could also serve to test one of the findings of the Whitehall II study whereby lower job grades were associated with higher levels of absence (Feeney et al., 1998).

The personal absence record of the FLM was included as existing research has shown they generally have the lowest sickness record (Garcia, 1987) and it would be useful to extend this further to see if their absence record correlated with the absence levels of their team as Kristensen et al. (2006) also hypothesised an association. It is also interesting to collate the self-reported personal absence levels of the FLMs as there is not an abundance of data available on manager level absence levels according to Johns and Nicholson (1982:133): *"Reliable records of employee absence are usually only maintained at the lower levels of organisations"*.

As the general literature on the changing role of FLMs suggests many FLMs are promoted as a consequence of their technical competence (Arroba and Wedgwood-Oppenheim, 1994), a question was added to the survey for this study to identify whether or not the respondents had previously worked in the organisation within a non-management role. Bolton (2003) discusses the difficulties in moving from colleague to boss and how this can affect the working relationships between FLMs and their former colleagues.

This is a recurring issue in other public sector based research, for example in the work by Leishman and Savage (1993) and Loo and Thorpe (2004) who discovered it could be difficult for managers to manage their former colleagues. It was therefore hypothesised that there might be an association between this variable and the absence levels of the FLMs' employees. The direction of this potential association was not identified as it could be argued that FLMs could either be

more or less lenient depending on their previous relationship with their subordinates.

As a consequence of the research and literature which has been analysed, the variables of gender, age, length of service, job grade, personal absence record and career history will be tested as hypotheses within this Doctoral study,

3.7.2. Variables related to 'organisational characteristics' and levels of sickness absence

Before looking specifically at organisational/work characteristics, it is useful to provide an overview of some of the seminal models of absence behaviour that encompass both personal and organisational characteristics and which therefore bridge the gap between sections 3.7.1 and 3.7.2.

The analysis of existing models is of particular importance to this study as it identifies potential gaps in the existing models where the variable of FLMS' characteristics could be added. Whilst a multitude of research studies exist which purport to explain absence behaviour, there have been relatively few attempts to model the variables to try and provide an explanation. Two of the most frequently used models are those by Nicholson (1977) and Steers and Rhodes (1978). Following on from a brief discussion of these two models an overview is presented of a range of later models which aimed to overcome some of the limitations of these earlier studies.

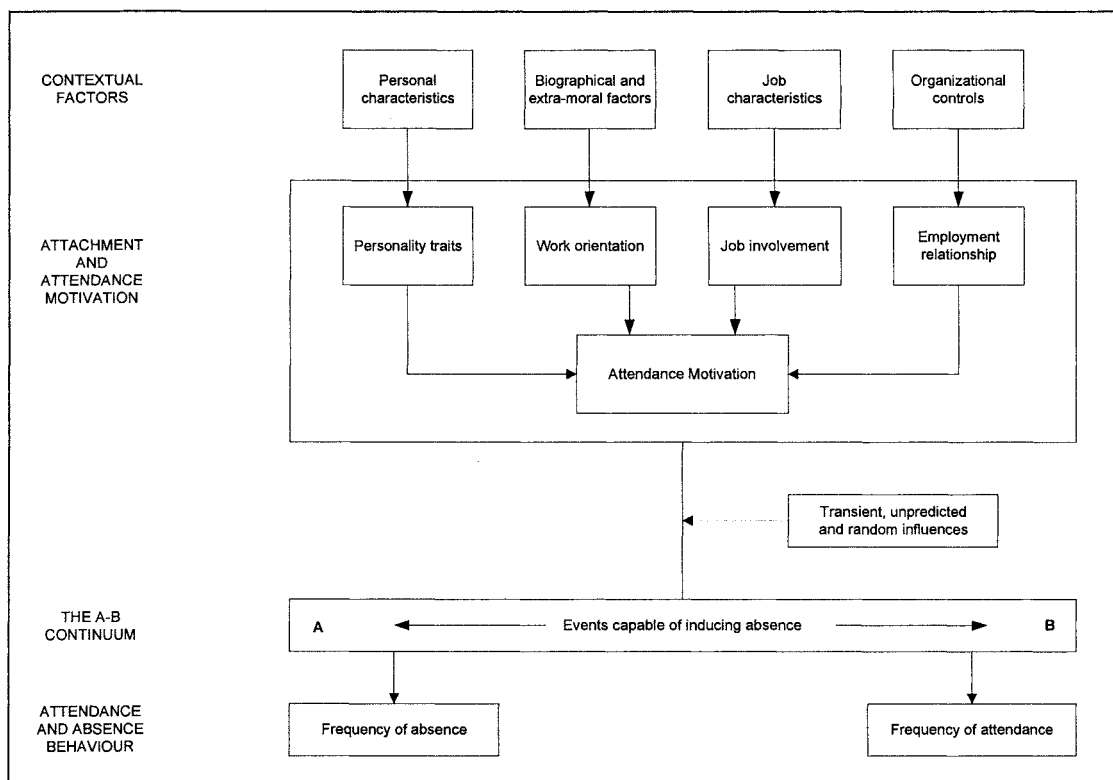
The seminal absence study by Nicholson (1977) as displayed in Figure 20 continues to be drawn upon within contemporary absence research (for example; Harrison and Martocchio, 1998 and Erickson et al., 2000). This is attributable to the fact that the model appears to demonstrate the complex nature of the factors that influence employee absence. The model suggests attendance is dependent upon a number of variables which affect the attachment and attendance motivation of the employee where attachment refers to the extent to which the employees need the regularity of their work (the need to attend). The model assumes that attendance at work is normal behaviour, and therefore that absence is abnormal. Nicholson (1977) believes that in order to find the reasons for absence, the factors that disturb the usual patterns of attendance need to be understood.

This model suggests that attendance is dependent upon a number of variables that affect the attachment and attendance motivation of the employee. It suggests that each of the variables are influenced by a contextual factor; the personal characteristics of the individual; their orientations and attitudes towards work; the nature of the job (and the opportunities it provides for the individual); rules of the workplace; and 'random' factors which could affect the individual's ability to attend. Nicholson (1977) presents absence behaviours as being on a continuum of A–B. The location of absences on the continuum depends on the extent to which an individual employee has the choice/discretion to decide upon attendance or non-attendance at work. On this continuum 'A' represents unavoidable influences which impact on the frequency of absence, this means that the individual employee would have little choice in the decision to be absent. At the other end, 'B' is avoidable influences which impact on the frequency of attendance; i.e. the employee has control over whether or not to attend work. From an organisational perspective, absences at the 'A' end are unavoidable, so the organisation should be concentrating on minimising absences at the 'B' end. Of course, these forces will vary between individual employees, as some forces will be stronger and more relevant depending on their individual circumstances. Nicholson (1977) believes that a person with high attachment to the organisation will not be as influenced by absence-inducing events and subsequently will only be absent when events are close to the 'B' side of the continuum (i.e. unavoidable). On the other hand, the employee with low attachment will be influenced not to come to work by events all along the A–B continuum.

A limitation of this model is that it may be difficult to test in practical terms (Brooke, 1986) and is therefore unlikely to be of use to HR managers and practitioners. One surprising omission from Nicholson's model is 'job satisfaction', which in the past decade has been one of the most frequently used variables in absence research. This may be a reflection of the timing of the research as it is now over 30 years old and the HR agenda has changed significantly during this period. Later models such as Brooke (1986) incorporated the variable of job satisfaction and are discussed in chronological order within this section. A further limitation is that Nicholson's model only addresses absence at the individual level and does not take into account group/team factors. Despite these potential limitations, the model is still a useful tool to explain the factors involved in employee absence behaviour.

This Doctoral research has the potential to enhance Nicholson's model in a number of ways. Firstly, it is suggested that it is not solely the personal characteristics of the employee that may be a factor in absence; rather the personal characteristics of FLMs should also be considered. The contextual factor of 'organisational controls' in Nicholson's model could also be broken down to incorporate how the role of FLMs could influence both the attachment and attendance motivation of their employees.

Figure 20 Model of Attendance Motivation by Nicholson, N. (1977) 'Absence behaviour and attendance motivation: A conceptual synthesis',

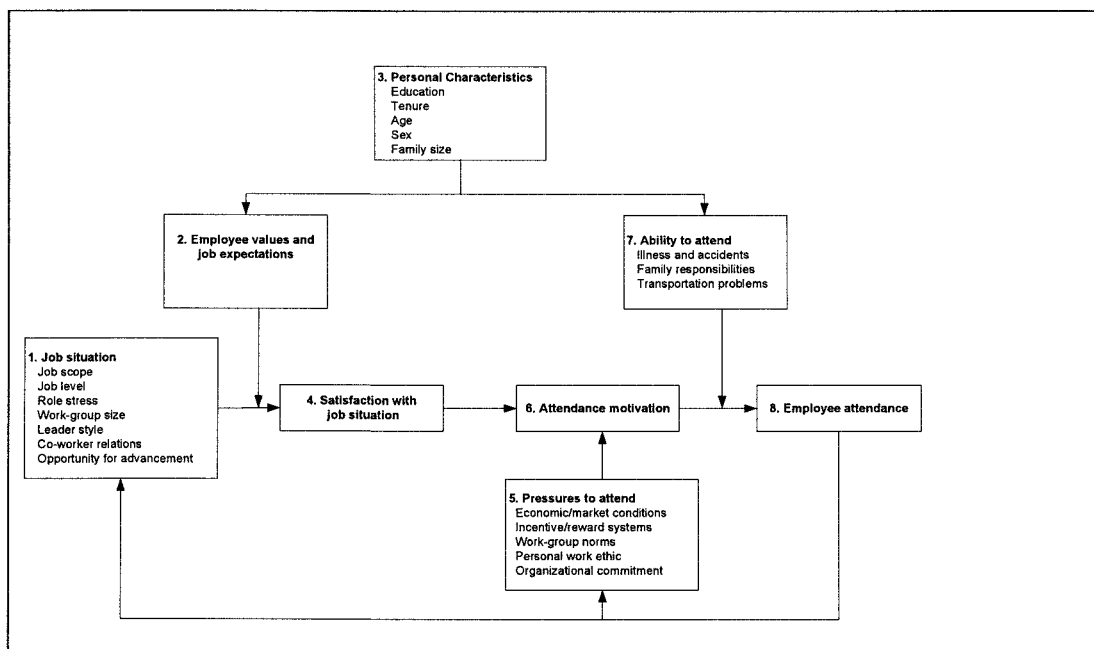


The absence model published by Steers and Rhodes (1978:392) a year after Nicholson (1977) was developed in an attempt to draw together the findings from previous research which the authors described as: *"fitting together the array of piecemeal findings on the subject"* and was based on a review of 104 empirical studies. As shown in Figure 21 the model consisted of a number of variables the authors believed had an impact on attendance levels. Two primary factors surrounding employee attendance were identified; motivation to attend work and ability to come to work. Motivation to attend work recognises that there are elements that an employee has control over and can make a decision about whether or not to attend work. The 'ability to come to work' reinforces the fact that there are issues outside of the control of the employee which may affect their

attendance. A simplistic overview of these two concepts would be issues that are within the control of employees and those that are not.

This model does not explicitly recognise the role played by FLMS and whether they may impact upon an employee's motivation to attend the workplace. However, the model features a variable entitled job situation which encompasses leader style, but there is no further guidance on what this entails, or how this could be measured. Steers and Rhodes' model could be criticised as it is not of practical use to managers in managing absence as few of the concepts are operationalised, perhaps because this was not one of the aims of the research.

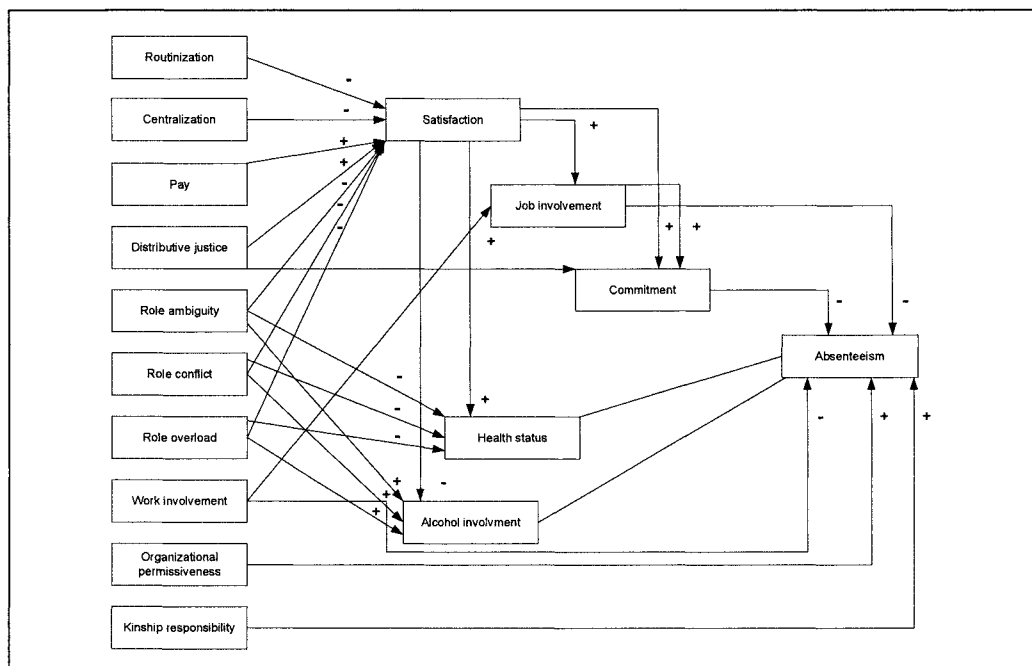
Figure 21 Major influences on employee attendance: A process model by Steers, R.M. and Rhodes, S.R. (1978) 'Major influences on employee attendance: A process model',



Brooke (1986:345) recognised there were strengths in Steers and Rhodes' (1978) model, including that it introduced "*order into the field*" within its multivariate approach but expressed concerns about the fact that definitions are not provided for all of the labels in the model e.g. 'job scope'; particularly when the areas can consist of several sub-variables. This led to the publication of Brooke's (1986) own model which is shown overleaf in Figure 22. Brooke's model focuses predominantly on 'voluntary' absences, using the frequency of absence as the measure rather than time lost. The model encompasses a wide range of variables; all of which are defined clearly within Brooke (1986) to allow researchers to be able to test and analyse the results of the model consistently.

The advantages of this model are that it encompasses a wide range of variables and is more easily translated into practice than earlier theoretical models. The author also provides strong justification for the inclusion of the variables and defines them clearly with reference to existing studies thereby providing a more empirically based model. With reference to the current Doctoral study, the variable of FLMS is again missing; however it could be argued that the role played by FLMS may be an intermediary factor within variables such as job satisfaction.

Figure 22 Causal model of absenteeism by Brooke, P.P. (1986) 'Beyond the Rhodes and Steers model of attendance'



Brooke and Price (1989:2) conducted research which aimed to extend the earlier conceptual study of Steers and Rhodes by creating a model which:

refines, modifies and extends their (Steers and Rhodes, 1978) summarizing framework into a series of testable hypotheses which integrate existing theory and previous research.

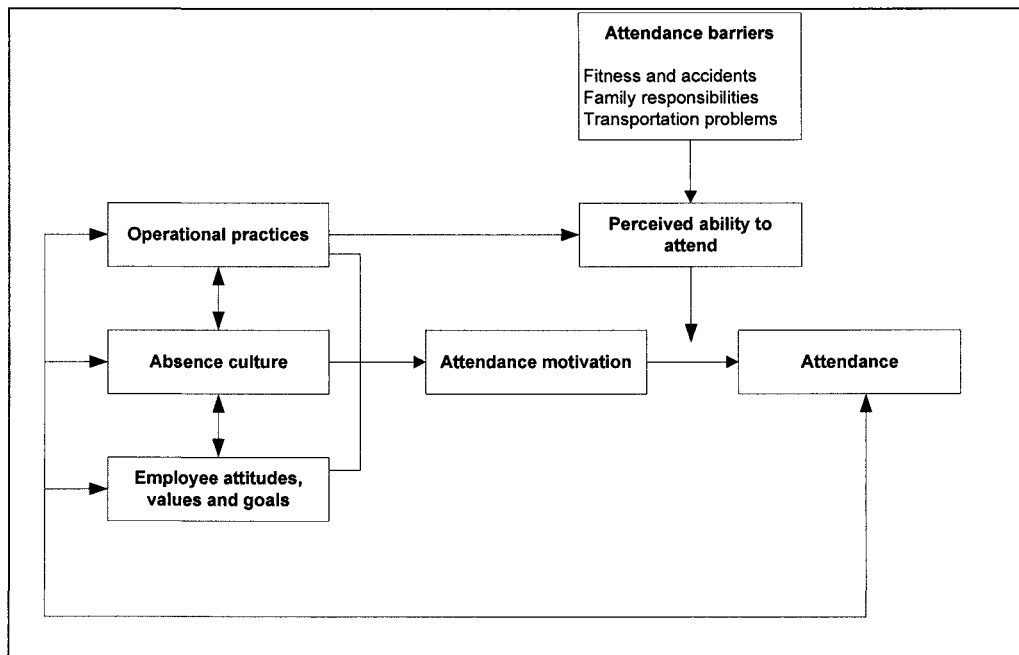
There were a number of interesting results from this study such as the association between role ambiguity, job satisfaction and centralisation which accounted for 21.6% of the variance of the absenteeism. This was an important study as it is more empirically based than the previous conceptually based models and the model which guided the study incorporates both direct and indirect effects on absenteeism.

However, Deery et al. (1995) believe that a limitation of this study is that it is based on white collar employees and therefore it may not be relevant across other types of workers. Later research by Burton et al. (2002) also proposed an extension of the work of Steers and Rhodes (1978) which confirms the importance of their seminal research. Burton et al. (2002) conducted survey research in a large national retailer, receiving 265 completed surveys from their respondents in the customer services department, providing an impressive response rate of 94.6%.

Their research concentrated on separating different types of absence including 'absence due to family problems' and 'absence due to transportation problems' rather than treating all types of absence the same in their ability to predict absence. The results indicated that the variable of 'motivation to attend' was not related to all of the different types of absence that they investigated and *"in these cases, ability to attend would be the primary predictor of employee absence"* (Burton et al., 2002:191). This provided a sound justification for separating the types of absence that were highlighted in the initial model by Steers and Rhodes (1978).

Rhodes and Steers published a revised model in 1990 (Rhodes and Steers, 1990) which addressed several of the perceived weaknesses of their previous version. This model was aimed at practitioners unlike the previous model and included increased attention to absence culture, organisational practices, societal context and perceived ability to attend. However, Harrison and Martocchio (1998) believe a limitation of this model is the lack of overall tests. Looking at the model in Figure 23 within the context of this Doctoral research, it is proposed the variable entitled 'organizational practices' could be developed further to specifically include the role of FLMS and how their characteristics could have an impact on the absence behaviour of their employees. This would contemporise the model to address this important issue.

Figure 23 Rhodes and Steers' Model of Attendance by Rhodes, S and Steers, R.M. (1990)
Managing employee absenteeism



More recently, Martocchio and Judge (1994) identified six factors which may affect an employee's decision to be absent. Figure 24 identifies these factors and it can be seen that five out of the six are not health related and therefore could be classed as non-genuine. This provides a challenge for organisations as there are factors outside of their control which may be difficult to identify and measure; similar challenges are incurred by researchers. The results of this research discovered genuine illness was *"the most salient antecedent of absence decisions"* (Martocchio and Judge, 1994: 378) and reinforces that organisations can only minimise absences to a certain point. This reinforces the work of James et al. (2002) who believe that insufficient attention is paid to genuine illness.

Figure 24 Factors affecting an employee's decision to be absent (Martocchio and Judge, 1994:362)

1. Hobbies/leisure activities unrelated to employment
2. Community or religious activities unrelated to employment
3. Day of the week (either side of a weekend, or the middle of the working week)
4. Kinship responsibilities that include either dependent children or other family responsibilities
5. Work demands (i.e. whether there is a heavy workload and pressing deadline or an average or light workload with no pressing deadlines)
6. Illness

Following on from the discussion of these key models of absence behaviour which integrate personal and organisational characteristics, it is appropriate to focus specifically on identifying organisational or workplace characteristics which may have an association with the absence levels of the FLMs' subordinates.

Research by CIPD (2008b) and CBI (2008) shows reported absence levels differ for different types of job such as manual and non-manual. For example; manual workers lose an average of 7.6 days per year in comparison to 6.1 days for non-manual workers. It is therefore reasonable to assume that within the context of a Local Authority where a diverse range of roles are carried out, that this may correlate with different levels of absence of employees situated in different areas of the organisation. Within the current study, two elements of information will be tested; the Division in which the FLM works followed by the Department in which they are based to examine whether an association exists with the levels of absence of their employees.

There is an existing research base which implies span of control may have a relationship with levels of absence (Smulders, 1983 and Doran et al., 2004) whereby larger work groups have higher levels of absence. The earlier work of Markham et al. (1982) suggested that there were some inherent difficulties in just looking at group sizes as the results could be interpreted in different ways. For example, an 'effective' supervisor might be asked to supervise more people or a supervisor may have to have a small team depending on the nature of the tasks they are responsible for. In their study based in the manufacturing sector, the results demonstrated that larger work teams had higher levels of absence (Markham et al., 1982). However, this was a records-based research project which did not take into account the reasons for absence or environmental factors. Winkler (1980:235) provides an explanation for the association between larger work teams and higher levels of absence "*The most frequent explanation for this phenomenon is that increase in size decreases communication and group cohesiveness*".

As it has also been established that part-time employees tend to have higher average levels of absence than their full time colleagues in some studies (Tuffin, 2001) and lower than average in other studies (e.g. Drago and Wooden, 1992) this inconsistency in the existing knowledge base is addressed by including this

variable as a sub-hypothesis. This is a particular issue when investigating absence in a Social Services context as the majority of the workforce tends to be part-time workers (www.communitycare.co.uk, 2006). There are also practical implications for FLMS who manage a predominantly part-time workforce as they are likely to have responsibility for a higher number of subordinates and therefore more potential absences to manage.

As a consequence of the research and literature which has been analysed, the variables of Division, Department, number of employees and number of part-time employees will be tested as hypotheses within this Doctoral study,

3.7.3. Variables related to 'general work attitudes' and levels of sickness absence.

This section investigates some of the characteristics which are related to 'general work attitudes' to see if there is any evidence that they may have an association with levels of sickness absence. Looking at variables such as job satisfaction and organisation commitment, the first part of this section looks at them from the perspective of employees. This is followed by looking at the range of characteristics from the perspective of FLMS, and whether there may be an association with the levels of their subordinates' sickness absence.

3.7.3.1. Variables related to 'general work attitudes' of employees

Bevan (2003:17) states: *"an employee's risk of being absent can be affected strongly by his/her attitudes to certain aspects of their work and the way they are managed"*. It is therefore appropriate to look at some of the specific attitudes and behaviours that have previously been researched. Bennett (2002) confirms the large number of variables which have been reviewed and suggests that they may impact either directly or indirectly on absence levels. Areas that have been investigated include job satisfaction; commitment to the organisation; team cohesiveness; organisational politics; size of workplace; size of work team; and levels of employee autonomy.

Perhaps the most frequently tested hypothesis is the existence of an association or relationship between levels of employee job satisfaction and their absence levels (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998). Hackett and Guion (1985:340) earlier described this hypothesis as: *"The intuitively appealing proposition that workers who are less satisfied with their jobs are more likely to be absent from work"*.

The popularity of this hypothesis as the basis for research studies can be gauged from the meta-analyses produced by Scott and Taylor (1985), Farrell and Stamm (1988) and Hackett (1989). Authors investigating the variable of job satisfaction have presented a range of different findings, with no consistency over whether or not an association exists between the variables. A summary of some of the key studies is shown in Table 9.

Table 9 Overview of existing research on relationship between job satisfaction and absence

Author(s)	Established relationship with levels of absence?
Nicholson et al. (1976)	No
Muchinsky (1977)	Yes
Steers and Rhodes (1978)	Job satisfaction as a moderating variable
Hackett and Guion (1985)	No
Zaccaro et al. (1991)	Yes, though some of the results with other variables were mixed.
Sagie (1998)	Yes for 'voluntary' absences
Goldberg and Waldman (2000)	No
Notenbomer et al. (2006)	'Global' job satisfaction was not correlated with the duration of short-term absences.

A critique by Porter and Steers (1973) is that the majority of studies on job satisfaction do not explore this dissatisfaction in sufficient depth to draw conclusions from this and to be able to make appropriate inferences. Studies published since 1973 are considered to suffer some of the same limitations (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998) as well as methodological inconsistencies; Scott and Taylor (1985:399) explains:

Findings suggest that sampling errors, scale inadequacies, and the use of different measures of job satisfaction and absence are the reasons for inconsistencies in previous empirical research that examined the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism.

The second most frequently studied organisation characteristic is commitment to the organisation (also referred to as organisational commitment) such as the work by Gellatly (1995) who examined the correlates of affective and continuance commitment using the components defined by Meyer and Allen (1991).

Affective commitment is defined by Gellatly (1995:470) as:

Affective commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization

Continuance commitment is defined by Gellatly (1995:240) as:

a general awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization, and is affected by anything that increases the perceived costs of leaving (e.g. acquisition of non-transferable skills, attractive compensation and benefits, and seniority privileges).

Gellatly's (1995) research was carried out with 166 staff from a chronic care hospital in the format of an employee survey, which was correlated with absence data from the organisation's records. The overall conclusions from this research was that an association did exist between organisation commitment and absence; specifically that affective commitment was inversely related to absence frequency and total number of days and continuance commitment was related only to absence frequency.

Cohen (2000) extends the existing research on commitment which is often referred to generically as organisation commitment, by focusing on different types of commitment employees may have, including: work involvement, work-group commitment, occupational commitment and group commitment. Cohen's research was carried out in three hospitals in Israel, which is a very different context in comparison to the UK public sector, however the distinctive research approach that he employed justifies its inclusion in a contemporary review of the theory base. Based on a sample of 283 nurses who completed a survey (which was correlated with organisational absence records) Cohen tested three different models of commitment. The results showed that it was occupational commitment which was statistically associated with absenteeism. Bakker et al. (2003:343) attempts to summarise the organisation commitment literature by stating:

The relationship between organizational commitment and absenteeism is rather low with absence frequency being more strongly related than absence duration.

A variety of other issues have been uncovered through the analysis of extant research, though on this occasion they are outside of the scope for this study. On a negative note, Voss et al. (2001) looked at the impact of reported bullying and found bullying in the workplace linked to almost double the level of absence. This is expected as absence can be interpreted as a withdrawal behaviour (Stumpf and

Dawley, 1981) or a mildly deviant behaviour (Johns, 1997), though some employees may withdraw permanently through leaving an organisation as a consequence.

Gilmore et al. (1996:482) conducted research into the impact of organisational politics on employee attendance and defined organisational politics as:

Self-serving behaviour that is not sanctioned by the organization and likely produces conflict and disharmony by pitting individuals and/or groups against one another or the organization.

They uncovered an association between the lengths of time employees had worked for their supervisor and attendance levels (Gilmore et al., 1996). They concluded low tenured individuals were more negatively affected by organisational politics and this was associated with higher levels of absence.

Geurts et al. (1993) conducted interesting research looking at aspects of the culture regarding absence in the organisation and specifically the perception of inequity in the exchange relationship with the company and the adjustment of one's personal absence norm to the absence norms of colleagues. Geurts et al. (1993:199) concluded "*The perception of inequity is associated with conflicts with superiors, which, in turn, motivate the driver to be absent*".

The work of Markham and McKee (1995:1175) suggests group level characteristics are important and states: "*Social interaction and social identity obtained from a work group will, we believe, shape what employees see as appropriate levels of absence*". This suggests an employee's decision about being absent may depend on what they believe is the norm within their workgroup and if there is a perception that absence is acceptable (even when unnecessary) this may affect their own decision. This could be linked with the literature on 'absence culture' which has been addressed by a number of authors including Nicholson and Johns (1985), Martocchio (1994), Rentsch and Steel (2003) and Patton and Johns (2007) who all believe that they have found evidence in their research to substantiate the existence of absence cultures in organisations.

The work of Drago and Wooden (1992) provides a particularly interesting perspective as they introduce two opposing arguments on the effects of workgroup norms on absence behaviour. They argue that the two opposing views are 'segmentation' and 'co-operation'.

Segmentation theory is defined as *“the development of strong group norms [which] promotes anti-firm behavior such as high absence rates”* (Drago and Wooden, 1992:765) which is consistent with the more negative connotations usually associated with absence cultures. The opposite view of co-operation implies that where employees work together with high cohesiveness may *“enforce employee commitment to the firm and thereby lead to lower levels of absence”* (Drago and Wooden, 1992:765). In response to the growing amount of literature on absence cultures Reijenga (2006) conducted a review of the existing research papers and identified 30 major cultural aspects that contributed to an ‘absence culture’ which is a useful tool in breaking down the concept into more testable variables. A copy of this tool is provided in Appendix Eight.

Other possible variables include; the amount of autonomy workers possess in their roles (Porter and Steers, 1973 and Durand, 1985) and how this may link to levels of absence as well as job scope (Mowday and Spencer, 1981). A number of studies have also raised issues which are specific to certain types of organisation. For example, in their study of bus drivers Geurts et al. (1993) identified issues such as irregular work-schedules, ergonomic problems in vehicles, traffic pressures and stressful contact with members of the public.

Nielsen et al. (2006) conducted a wide-scale survey with 1,919 employees across 52 Danish worksites in order to examine the psychosocial work environment. After investigating seven different psychosocial figures they found evidence that ‘support from supervisors’ and ‘predictability’ showed significant effects with both short and long term spells of absence. A limitation of this study is that the characteristics of long and short term spells were defined using measures which were relevant to the way that sick pay is organised in Denmark. This system is not consistent with other countries such as the UK and this may have had an impact on the results, it would therefore be advisable to replicate this study in different contexts to provide a comparison.

Farrell and Stamm’s (1988:221) meta-analysis of the correlates of employee absence concludes *“organization-wide and work effectiveness factors are better predictors of employee absence than are demographic and psychological factors”*. However variables such as work effectiveness may be more difficult to measure and correlate with levels of absence. As a consequence researchers,

organisations and practitioners need to accept there are elements which cannot be 'treated' or removed. Garrison and Muchinsky (1977) hypothesised it was possible to calculate the 'absence proneness' of employees, working on the belief that a small number of employees are responsible for a large amount of the organisation's overall absence. However their research was not able to prove this hypothesis.

When investigating the characteristics unveiled within this review, it remains prudent to consider the thoughts of Avery and Hotz (1984:159) who argue:

There is a large component of the occurrence of any absence that is random and cannot be predicted by either the individual or those trying to analyse the individual's data.

This section of the review of extant research has identified a potentially large pool of variables that could be investigated further by investigating the characteristics of FLMS. Section 3.7.3.2 concentrates on five variables that are considered to be 'general work attitudes' and reflects on the extant research in these areas in relation to FLMS.

3.7.3.2. Variables related to 'general work attitudes' of FLMS and levels of sickness absence.

The concepts of job satisfaction and organisation commitment have been explored in the wider context of whether there is an association between the employees satisfaction and commitment and their levels of sickness absence. When looking specifically at the attitudes of FLMS it is appropriate to look at these two issues and whether they may have an association with the levels of absence of their subordinates.

Work by Farrell and Stamm (1988) provides an overview of many of the existing studies carried out looking at job satisfaction and absence, the argument is broadened within this study to see whether an association exists between the levels of job satisfaction of FLMS and the levels of absence of their subordinates. Mowday et al. (1982) believe job satisfaction is an intermediate variable in the relationship between leader style and subordinate absenteeism.

A similar argument is proposed with the variable of 'organisation commitment' (Bennett, 2002) where previous literature suggests low levels of organisation commitment correlates with higher levels of absence. Work by Richmond et al. (1983) found the most positive impact on satisfaction levels of subordinates occurred when an employee-centred approach was implemented as opposed to a coercive or reward power relationship. These implied relationships between organisation commitment and levels of employee absence will therefore be tested within the present study.

In addition to these two 'work related' variables (job satisfaction and organisation commitment of FLMs), the theory base suggests that there are a range of other FLM-specific work attitudes which may be associated with levels of subordinate absence. These issues will now be identified and discussed within the remainder of this section of the review of existing research.

A body of literature is available which states the importance of FLMs in accepting their people management responsibilities (e.g. Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003). If the FLMs do not accept that they have responsibility for these tasks it is unlikely that they will dedicate sufficient time or resources to ensure that they are carried out effectively and in line with the organisation's policies. Cunningham et al. (2004) provides examples where the required partnerships between the stakeholders did not work and the absent employees were disadvantaged because of ambiguity over who was responsible for people management issues. Looking specifically at absence management, IPD (1995) is clear about the importance of FLMs accepting their role; this is also confirmed in the later work of Bennett (2002:436) who states "*Absence levels tend to be lower or improving in cases where line managers actively acknowledge their responsibilities for absence management*".

However, it is important to recognise that issues such as these may not be widespread throughout whole organisations; it may only be a small percentage of FLMs. Mixed views on this issue were uncovered in the work of Renwick (2003) when interviewing 40 FLMs from a number of different organisations, and this issue is also consistent with the findings of Peach Martins (2007) who uncovered mixed responses. The current research develops this strand of study further by correlating the extent to which FLMs accept their people management responsibilities with the levels of sickness absence of their subordinates.

There is also emerging literature which has identified a potential correlation between the management styles of FLMs and the impact on the absence levels of their employees (Johnson et al., 2003 and Michie and Williams, 2003) which builds on the much earlier work of Argyle et al. (1958). Judge and Martocchio (1995) began some work on looking at the attitude traits of supervisors to see whether this had any implications on the way they managed sickness absence. Their hypothesis was that supervisors who placed a high emphasis on fairness would advocate more severe disciplinary actions where discretion was built into the policy and the null hypothesis was rejected within their results. In this context it appears the supervisors were trying to be fair to the employees who were present by trying to eliminate the malingering of their colleagues who were suspected of absences for non-genuine reasons.

Another closely related area is the work which investigates the links between supervisory behaviour and employee burnout by Seltzer and Numerof (1988) who established the leadership behaviour of supervisors did have an impact on subordinate burnout, though the methods employed within this research were not sufficient to provide a causal link. Tharenou (1993:282) conducted research in a similar area and provides evidence that the management/leadership style of managing can impact on absence levels:

Perceived supervisory style, especially support, is more likely to reduce uncertified absence than the reverse.

In order to examine this concept within the current research, the model will aim to capture the 'management style' of the FLMs to uncover whether there is a relationship between their style and the levels of absence of their subordinates.

Throughout this review of the extant literature, a common theme has been the need for all of the stakeholders (but predominantly FLMs and HR) to work together in trying to minimise levels of sickness absence (James et al., 2002; Cunningham et al., 2004; Robson, 2007c). This has included the need for visible senior management commitment (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003) so that both FLMs and their employees understand the importance of effective absence management.

Earlier within this chapter, the changing role of FLMs was explored in depth and it was clear that a positive relationship would be needed with the HR specialists within organisations. This is confirmed in the conclusions of the study by Larsen and Brewster (2003:241) who warn:

The relationship between HR specialists and line managers is not a simple one. Indeed, it is a rather complex, ambiguous and dynamic one.

The work of Watson et al. (2007) is interesting even though they did not focus specifically on absence, as they conducted research with different layers of management across the Hilton Hotels Group, including FLMs. Within the deductive research approach that was used only a small proportion of FLMs identified that they felt insufficiently supported by HR when dealing with people management tasks. However, this may be because they were not asked a specific question on this issue (though it was raised by 5% of the respondents who make additional comments). Further results in Watson et al. (2007) showed that senior managers were more likely to rate HR highly than their FLM colleagues, which suggests that there may be tensions between FLMs and HR. On the basis of these studies it is appropriate to test whether FLMs feel that they receive adequate support from HR within the managing absence process. This concept is extended further within the present study by also determining the levels of support received from additional key stakeholders.

As a consequence of the research and literature which has been analysed, the variables of job satisfaction, organisation commitment, acceptance of responsibility for people management tasks, management style and support from other stakeholders will be tested as hypotheses within this Doctoral study.

3.7.4. Variables related to 'knowledge of absence' and levels of sickness absence.

As part of the holistic overview of the literature in relation to absence management, it is necessary to provide an overview of how absence is managed (or should be managed) based on extant research. In addition to being a key component in the field of absence research, it also sets the context in which FLMs work and identifies some of the inherent challenges.

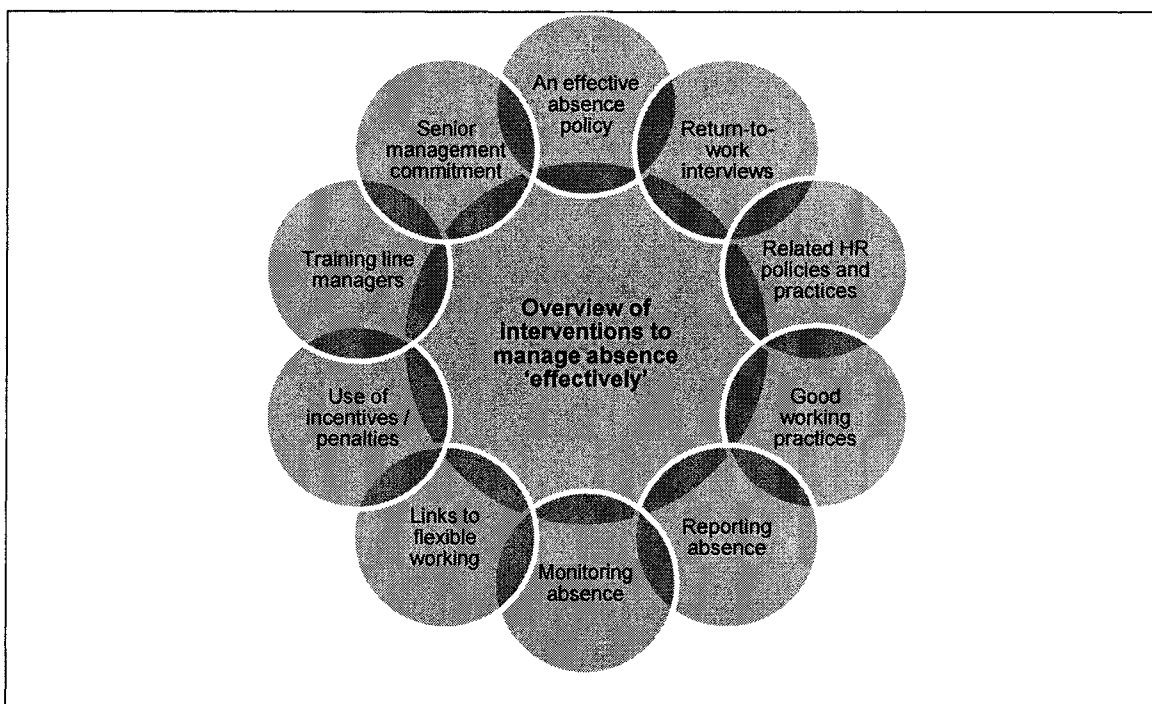
3.7.4.1. A review of best practice in managing absence

Before organisations can decide which interventions they could use, they need to identify what the actual issues are so they can choose the most appropriate course(s) of action. A range of different interventions are discussed within both academic and practitioner literature, and an overview of the key emerging themes are shown in Figure 25 before being discussed in more detail. This diagram deliberately shows the different interventions overlapping the main concept of managing absence effectively to demonstrate the multi-pronged approach needed as confirmed by Dibben et al. (2001a) which is conceptualised by Johnson et al. (2003:337) as a “*menu of interventions*”. This is consistent with the work of Robson (2006) who emphasises the different strands involved in managing absence.

As part of this research ‘effective’ absence management has been defined by the author as:

Managing absence by minimising non-genuine absences so employees are only absent when they are unable to attend; whilst at the same time, ensuring that genuinely absent employees receive appropriate levels of support in line with the organisation’s policies and procedures.

Figure 25 Overview of absence management interventions identified by the researcher through the review of the existing theory base



3.7.4.1.1. An effective absence management policy

The vital role of the absence management policy was confirmed in the work of Cabinet Office (2004) and is confirmed by Hayday et al. (2007:vi): “ *A well documented policy is essential for any [police] force to successfully manage absence*”. CIPD (2007b) reinforces this by commenting:

The first step to managing absence effectively is to ensure that you have a clear [absence management] policy in place that supports your organisation’s business objectives and culture.

The reason why the absence management policy is so vital is clarified in the work of Deery et al. (1995:831) who state:

Organizational policies can have the effect of either rewarding or discouraging absenteeism which suggests that the content of the policy can have a fundamental impact on the way that absence is managed in organisations and their resultant absence levels.

Evidence from National Audit Office (2004b and 2006) also provides support for the argument that a focus on absence policies is integral to this piece of work. Based on previous research he investigated as part of his study, Bennett (2002) believes stringent absence management policies should be used when organisations have high levels of absence. This confirms the earlier work by Dalton and Todor which evaluated a number of existing studies (1993:207) and concluded “*organisations can drastically reduce the extent of employee absenteeism by adopting policies which deter, not encourage, absenteeism*”. However, Dalton and Todor (1993) also acknowledged within their work that inappropriate policies could potentially increase absence and therefore stress the importance of the policy context and ensuring it is relevant to the organisation and its context.

The benefits of having a policy appear to be accepted by organisations as CIPD (2008b) shows more than 90% of their respondents stated they had one, in comparison to 83% of organisations who stated they had one in the 2003 survey (CIPD, 2003). One of the main advantages of having a policy is that it clarifies the expectations of the organisation, and can stipulate the responsibilities of all of the appropriate stakeholders (Hayday, 2008). This includes the absent employees, as

they need to be clear about what they need to do when they need to be absent (Whitaker, 2001). A comprehensive policy will facilitate the process of managing absence consistently throughout the organisation and all of its departments which is essential (McHugh, 2002).

The existence of a policy alone is not sufficient; the content and structure must also be closely considered. Organisations such as CIPD and Acas both offer guidance to HR professionals via their websites as to what should be included in a comprehensive policy. Figure 26 provides an overview of the contents advocated by Acas (2006).

Figure 26 Good practice guidance: the content of absence policies (Adapted from Acas, 2006)

- Introductory statement
- Procedures for notification of absence
- Requirements for evidence of incapacity
- Use of medical advice/help
- Information on long term sickness
- The role of FLMs
- Details on maternity absence
- Guidance on disability related absences
- Arrangements for return-to-work interviews and clarification of trigger points
- Details of sick pay

A range of content related issues have been previously explored such as the requirement within the absence management policy that absences must be reported personally to the line manager has been shown to reduce absence levels in the research by Winkler (1980) who conducted his research on American school teachers. Specific information should also be included on the trigger points the organisation uses to review absence histories and the resultant actions (CIPD, 2007b). In order for the policies to be effective they must be made accessible to employees and FLMs (Ahmed, 2008). This means they should be physically accessible as well as being written in language capable of being easily understood by employees.

Although referring to good practice when designing policies is important, they are most effective when they are designed specifically for the individual organisation as Johnson et al. (2003:338) believe policies that do not recognise the organisation's '*unique cultural features*' may not be as effective in managing absence.

Looking at more general HR policies, this view is confirmed in the case study research of Truss (2001:1122) who states:

the success, or otherwise, of HRM policies ultimately depends on their organizational context, and on the way in which policies are interpreted and enacted in practice.

Horder (1999) also explores some unique angles by viewing the contents of an absence policy as a potential source of anxiety for employees with health problems. This may manifest itself into cases of presenteeism which can be a particularly serious issue for employees working in roles which may be described as 'safety-sensitive' or 'quality critical' (Milano, 2005:30).

Through the review of the literature on absence management policies a series of criteria were generated which when assimilated could be used as a basis to analyse organisational absence policies (this is explored in more detail in Chapter Four). These criteria are outlined below in Table 10 alongside the original source which identified the issue. It was clear from the research review process that only a small number of academic authors had discussed this policy issue, therefore a number of the criteria were generated from best practice practitioner resources. This use of practitioner focused resources is consistent with the methods employed in existing research studies; for example Dibben et al. (2001a) refers to a number of Government papers (e.g. Cabinet Office, 1998) when discussing best practice in absence management.

Table 10 Overview of criteria to analyse absence policies

Criteria	Source of good practice
Clear policy objectives contained within the absence policy	Australian Public Service Commission (2006)
The need for the policy to be written in a way that employees can understand	Bevan (2003)
Actions from trigger points are made clear	National Audit Office (2004b)
Definitions of technical terms are provided within the policy	Hayday (2008)
The roles of all of the key players are defined	Cunningham et al. (2004)
There is a clear emphasis on senior management commitment	Dibben et al. (2001a)
The role of Occupational Health is clarified	James et al. (2002)
The procedures that need to be followed by absent employees are clear	Bevan (2003)
there are adequate details of return-to-work support mechanisms	Cabinet Office (1998)
Clarification of how the organisation will contact and deal with absent employees	Cunningham and James (2000)
A distinction is made between the management of short and long term absences	Hayday et al. (2007)

There is an emphasis on determining the reason for absence before action is taken	Hayday (2006)
The absence levels for different trigger points are clearly defined	Bevan and Hayday (2003)
Clear rules are provided for self-certification and medical certification for absences	Acas (2006)
There is provision for how absences will be dealt with when they may be covered by Disability Discrimination Act	Cabinet Office (1998)
The arrangements for contractual sick pay are clear	CIPD (2007b)
The arrangements for statutory sick pay are clear	CIPD (2007b)
It is clear that disciplinary action or sanctions may be used in some circumstances	National Audit Office (2004b)
There is evidence that the organisation is proactively addressing health issues with their employees	DPP (2008)
Contact numbers for further support and advice are provided	Cabinet Office (1998)
The overall tone of the policy is supportive to employees who are genuinely ill	National Audit Office (2004)

Finally, in relation to absence management policies, it is appropriate to consider the findings of the research conducted by Majchrzak (1987). Whilst this research took place in a unique environment, with US Marine Corps, the design of the research strategy and research results remain interesting to the general field of absence management research. One of the over-riding propositions of this research was that having an absence policy was insufficient and it was necessary for senior managers to communicate the policy clearly for it to be most effective (and reduce levels of unauthorised absences). This hypothesis was proven within the research which concluded:

The communication of higher-level management policies influences a unit's rate of unauthorised absences. This rate, however, is reduced only when the communication yields increased consistency among managers and increased knowledge of the policies among unit managers. (Majchrzak, 1987:519)

Reviewing the subject of absence management policies in the existing knowledge base was essential to meet the following objective of this Doctoral study:

- To investigate how absence should be managed holistically through an analysis of the organisation's absence management policies, to support the role played by FLMs.

As a consequence of the literature confirming the importance of absence policies in effective absence management, the FLMs' knowledge of the policy will be tested as one of the sub-hypotheses for this study. In addition, because the content of the policy is clearly a very important factor in enabling FLMs to manage absence effectively, this will inform the design of the research methods to include an analysis of GMBC's absence management policy and procedures.

3.7.4.1.2. Return to work interviews

CIPD (2008b) confirms return-to-work interviews are the most frequently used absence management intervention and evidence suggests they are the most effective way to try to minimise absence. They involve holding a discussion with an absent employee when they return to work to find out why they were absent and ensure they are fit to return to work, though they also have a dual function in reminding employees that their absence has been noted (Edwards and Whitston, 1989).

Whilst they can be an effective intervention, there are inevitably issues involved with them. For example, research carried out by Cunningham and James (2000) with 77 HR professionals used a postal survey to gain insights into absence trends and return-to work activities and could not detect significant differences in absence levels between the organisations that did have a return-to-work policy and those without one. Conversely, in the same study (Cunningham and James, 2000) it was interesting to discover the organisations who had a formal policy were more likely to report a trend of decreasing absence levels (41% of the respondents reported a decrease) thus disagreeing with the results of the latest CIPD annual absence survey (CIPD, 2008b).

Bennett (2002) identified another issue in that the return-to-work processes were not always carried out consistently within organisations, which can lead to problems associated with bias. It therefore appears essential they are carried out after every absence if this is what is stipulated within the organisation's absence policy, and this is a role played by FLMs. A criticism of the use of these interviews is they can appear to be a bureaucratic exercise (Chojnacki, 2008), it is therefore important to sell the benefits involved to the different group of stakeholders.

Whilst the majority of research on return-to-work interviews portrays them as a positive absence management intervention, Harvey and Nicholson (1999:981) suggest that carrying them out after every occasion may lead to a 'low trust culture'. It therefore seems apparent that the introduction and implementation stage is crucial and that the purpose is clearly explained so that employees understand that the return to work procedures are part of a support mechanism.

3.7.4.1.3. Related HR policies: A holistic process

When considering the links between general organisational HR policies and procedures, Baptiste (2008:288) is clear that:

Past research suggests that when HR practices are used in conjunction with each other, the impact on performance will be greater than when used in isolation.

As work by McHugh (2001) is also clear that managing absence needs to be included as part of a holistic approach to human resource management, this holistic theme to absence management is pursued within this research. This means that it should be integrated with other relevant HR policies and procedures. For example; the process of trying to prevent avoidable absences should begin at the recruitment stage (Cabinet Office, 2004) where it is important robust procedures are followed for exploring previous absence records. Looking at performance management; managing absence should be one of the criteria FLMS are assessed on (Hayday et al., 2007). It would therefore seem sensible for managing absence to be formally recorded within the job descriptions of FLMS to emphasise the importance of the task. McGovern et al. (1997) investigated the extent to which FLMS were appraised on their ability to follow HR policies and found that less than half of the respondents to their survey believed this was an important appraisal criterion.

3.7.4.1.4. Good working practices

FLMS can play an important role in trying to enhance the working practices of their subordinates and this is one of the reasons that organisations devolve many people management tasks to FLMS (Brewster and Larsen, 2000). They can support their employees by ensuring they have clarity in their role and provide training opportunities to allow their team to maintain and develop their existing skills sets. Elements of this training could be in the form of job enrichment. This is

important as there is evidence to suggest that jobs which are unchallenging are more likely to be associated with higher levels of absence (Brooke and Price, 1989). This was also confirmed in the study on employees within the manufacturing sector that was carried out by Deery et al. (1995) who found that respondents with highly routinised jobs had higher levels of 'avoidable' absences. Bockerman and Ilmakunnas (2008:525) commented:

The policy lesson is that the improvement of working conditions must be an integral part of any scheme that is aimed at decreasing sickness absences.

The work of Dwyer and Ganster (1991) on work stressors including the amount of control that employees have over their work, provides an interesting contribution to this debate. Their work was carried out within a manufacturing organisation and found evidence that where employees perceived that they had little control over how their work was carried out and the environment in which they work, they exhibited higher levels of sickness absence. Dwyer and Ganster's (1991) research is particularly insightful due to their method of using both self-reported measurements of work-stressors as well as objective job analysis data, thereby potentially improving the validity of the findings.

Ose (2005) investigated relationships between the work environment and levels of absence from the perspective of an economist and suggests that employers need to compensate employees if they are working in a difficult working environment, or levels of voluntary absence or 'shirking' will increase. This would include variables such as a noisy workplace, and requirements to use dangerous materials or machinery. Further potential environmental factors were identified within the context of the call centre agency as having potential effects on levels of employee absence, Taylor et al. (2003:438) suggest that the 'proximate environment' includes work technology and workstation design and 'ambient environment' includes the lighting, temperature, air quality and acoustics of the workplace.

Michie and Williams (2003) and Marklund et al. (2008) also identified a number of issues which may have an association with higher levels of sickness absence. These include lack of control over work, lack of participation in decision making and unclear work roles. Some of these issues are subjective and it is likely even with adjustments, not all employees would be satisfied.

3.7.4.1.5. Reporting and recording absences

Johnson et al. (2003) are clear about the importance of recording absence accurately and on a timely basis. However, evidence from NAO (2006) and Hill et al. (2007) concluded that this does not always happen in organisations and identified inconsistencies in the way that absences were classified, which would then impact on the accuracy of the data analysis. The research from NAO (2006) was carried out by independent consultants who employed a diverse range of research methods including interviews, questionnaires to Chief Officers, absence data analysis and a staff attitude survey. The range of methods used enhances the validity of their research conclusions.

In response to a research call from the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Ritchie et al. (2005:ix) conducted research into how absences should be recorded, and via an extensive research process they generated a series of recommendations which would provide organisations with a framework for collecting and recording all of the necessary information. Requirements for the recording systems include:

- The system should report separately on short and long term absences
- There should be an option for graphical presentation of the key reports

These recommendations would have clear benefits for FLMs as it would enable them to easily collate the information that they require in an easily understandable format. An overview of the additional recommendations from Ritchie et al. (2005) is provided within Appendix Nine.

A short-term consequence of improving the reporting process to make it more robust is that absence levels can look as if they are increasing in the short term, but this may simply reflect the fact that absences have been under-reported in the past (CIPD 2007a). It is essential that managers have access to accurate absence information as Conlon and Stone (1992:436) conducted research into the ways that managers may use this data which reflects the wider implications of sickness absence and how it can be linked to other HR practices:

This information can be an important input to the decisions that are routinely made about employees such as job assignments or performance appraisals.

3.7.4.1.6. Monitoring absences

Despite the amount of press and public attention which is now paid to sickness absence it is surprising only 40% of organisations monitor the costs of absence and only 40% have an actual target for reducing absence (CIPD, 2008b). As only 39% of respondents to CIPD (2008b) benchmark their absence rates, it is clear that less than four in ten organisations are following best practice advice in these areas. This is despite the earlier work of Havergal (1996) who identified the importance of having comparative data in order to make progress in minimising absence levels in the future. Good information systems are vital to enable the monitoring of absences so FLMs are referring to accurate data (Cabinet Office, 2004), it is also essential the information can be provided to the FLMs in an appropriate format (Arnott and Emmerson, 2001) so that the information is meaningful and can be acted upon. It is then up to FLMs to ensure that they consider their absence data and make any appropriate interventions (Havergal, 1996).

Absence data information could also be provided to individual employees so that they understand how their absence levels compare to the rest of the work-team and organisation, which may help to dispel misconceptions that individual employees have lower rates of absence than their colleagues (Gellatly and Luchak, 1998). Gaudine and Saks (2001) conducted some interesting research which took the concept of monitoring absences further, by providing absence feedback to employees on a number of occasions to see if this process had an impact on absence levels. Whilst the results showed an increase in absence for employees who had above average levels of absence, the authors concede that the actual impact on absence levels was minimal.

Recent research by Robson (2007b) was carried out in the Adult Service Departments of two Councils and the survey results revealed that the majority of FLMs were unaware of the extent of their absence problem. This was tested by asking them to compare their absence levels against other groups of employees and the majority of FLMs believed that their absence levels were lower than or the same as the comparator groups. These views of the FLMs were not substantiated by the actual reported absence levels as the levels of absence of their teams were significantly higher. This failure to identify higher than average levels of attendance suggests that the FLMs were unaware of the extent of their absence 'problem' and

therefore it was suggested that reducing absence levels was unlikely to have been a priority.

When discussing long term absence, James et al. (2006:295) reiterate the point that the existence of policy and frameworks alone is insufficient. A monitoring arrangement needs to be put in place to ensure the policies are being followed, preferably alongside a quality control process. Although Cunningham et al. (2006:218) found one of their case study organisations was efficient in monitoring that return-to-work interviews were carried out, this appears to be the exception rather than the rule. It is therefore essential the performance of managers is monitored and reviewed in this area (James et al., 2002).

3.7.4.1.7. Flexible working and work-life balance: links with levels of employee absence

McGuire and Liro (1987) conducted research into the impact of flexible working; specifically 'flexitime' and 'staggered fixed working hours' on levels of absenteeism. The results showed that employees working flexitime hours took more short term sickness absence than those working on staggered fixed working hours (3.79 and 2.32 hours per month respectively). This does not comply with the rational assumption that employees who had greater flexibility in their working hours would find it easier to balance this with other commitments and therefore take less sickness absence.

Unfortunately much of the contemporary research in this area focuses on anecdotal research rather than correlations with levels of absence (Hyman and Summers, 2004). For example within their paper which aims to provide a business case for work-life balance, Lewis and Cooper (1995: 293) state: *"Organizations which do not respond to work family needs also bear the costs in terms of absenteeism"* amongst other possible implications such as increased presenteeism.

One US-based study (Boyar et al., 2005) is empirically grounded in its investigation of a manufacturing organisation. A 27% response rate was achieved from distributing a survey to 1,600 assembly line workers and this was matched with the absence histories provided in the organisational records. Overall, it was hypothesised that there would be a positive association between family-work-conflict (FWC) however the actual result showed a significant negative

association. However, when analysing the results by gender, the research established that women with high WFC had the highest levels of absenteeism.

The concept of work-life balance is important as the Improving Working Lives Standard (Department of Health, 2000) is clear that employees are more productive and satisfied when they can balance their work and home lives.

Allowing staff to have more flexibility in their role and to some extent variety, may have wider benefits for the organisation as it may increase the levels of motivation and commitment from the employees. This is a particular problem in UK workforces as White et al. (2003) confirm that UK full-time workers work the longest hours in the European Union.

A further strand related to work-life balance revolves around one of the causes of absence that remains difficult to measure due to its nature. The idiographic-longitudinal study of 140 nurses by Hackett et al. (1989) uncovered the need for a '*mental health day*' to be prevalent across their sample of nurses. The author later explains this concept as "*nurses stay away from work primarily to deal with periodic bouts of emotional-physical fatigue*" (Hackett et al., 1989:450). This suggests that whilst the employees may not be physically incapable of attending work, they still require some space away from the organisation.

The use of sporadic 'mental health days' may be positive in the longer term by reducing the need for longer absences at a later date, this is particularly likely in stressful organisational environments (e.g. in the work of Lambert et al., 2005 which was carried out research with prison service staff). As work-life balance is becoming more important in organisations, it is necessary for FLMS to understand the concepts, benefits and practicalities involved.

3.7.4.1.8. Incentives for attending work

A number of organisations now take the approach of rewarding employees for attending work (Schlotzhauer and Rosse, 1985 and Harvey and Nicholson, 1993). There are different rewards strategies employed including financial bonuses, additional leave, or prize draws. However, the perspective in some organisations may be that this effectively equates to paying an employee twice (Harvey et al., 1983 and Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002) and this may mean schemes do not get senior management approval. This would be a particular challenge in the public sector where the terms and conditions of employment are negotiated centrally (Cabinet Office, 2004).

In 1985, Schlotzhauer and Rosse (1985) published the results of their five year study into incentive programmes whereby the incentive was that employees could convert unused sickness absence into extended annual leave. The authors' (Schlotzhauer and Rosse, 1985) longitudinal research design and use of a comparator group suggests that the data that they collected is less likely to be affected by spurious results as may be the case in research that looks at a snapshot in time. The overall conclusions of this research were that there was an 11.7% return-on-investment from the incentive programme. This finding is also interesting as there are not many studies to date which have calculated the tangible benefits and this remains a contemporary concern for both academics and employers (BITC, 2007).

Incentive programmes may take place on a regular basis or in "*intermittent schedules of reinforcement*" (Durand, 1985:151). The most high profile UK-based example of an incentive approach is provided by Royal Mail who gave prizes of 39 brand new cars, 780 shopping vouchers and a £150 holiday discount vouchers to the remaining 55,000 employees who had a perfect attendance record over the 2005-2006 financial year (Royal Mail, 2006). Even with the high costs associated with running this scheme, Royal Mail believe the benefits outweighed the costs by 80-1 (Allen, 2007) and they saw their absence levels reduce by 18% which is a significant improvement for the organisation. However, it is unlikely many organisations would be able to replicate such a scheme and the internal source of this information needs to be taken into account. This may mean that the measurement lacks academic rigour and is unlikely to have controlled for any other factors which may have had an impact on absence levels.

Conversely, Chatterji and Tilley (2002:670) take a different perspective, by suggesting that the concept of providing sick pay alone may be an incentive:

By offering sick pay, firms are in effect increasing the workers' incentives to absent themselves even more, thus potentially driving a greater wedge between actual hours worked and official hours set by the firm.

This implies that careful consideration should be given to the design of sick pay schemes, however relying on the views of Chatterji and Tilley (2002) may be too simplistic as organisations need to be able to operate competitively within the marketplace.

Barmby et al. (2001) carried out research focusing on the absence behaviors of employees in relation to their contracted workdays and concluded that employees contracted for four days a week rather than five days had significantly higher levels of absence; and that this was partially explained by the company's approach to sick pay. Conversely, it may be difficult to generalise these findings across organisations and industries due to the way that the manufacturing case study organisations ranked their employees as 'low' or 'high' absence and used their categorisation to determine the levels of sick pay entitlement. There is little evidence in the wider research base to suggest that this is a common approach.

3.7.4.1.9. Penalties for high levels of absence

The opposite approach to offering incentives for attendance is to 'punish' those who have high levels of sickness absence. To date there are mixed conclusions as to whether this has a corresponding effect on levels of absence. For example, Harvey and Nicholson (1993) found evidence of temporary improvements but their research was constrained by the lack of monitoring data available from organisations.

There are varying levels of punitive actions which are available to organisations. It now appears common place for organisations to make reference to their disciplinary policy within their absence management policy and procedures, and for many organisations this is their main or only sanction (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002). According to CIPD (2008b) this is the second most frequently used intervention by organisations, however a limitation of the format of this survey is that respondents do not provide data on the effectiveness of the intervention. Organisations may introduce deterrents to be absent unnecessarily by withholding company sick-pay, reducing annual leave entitlements and dismissal for poor attendance (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002). Few studies focusing on punitive actions by employers have been identified. One exception is Nicholson (1976:143) who undertook a paper-based research process within an American organisation by analysing its absence records. This is an interesting study whereby the organisation deliberately took tough action at a point in time to try to make an impact on absence levels. This was achieved by a "*systematic retrospective check on employee absence records*" which led to a number of employees receiving written and verbal warnings; eight employees were dismissed as a result of these

disciplinary actions (Nicholson, 1976:143). In this instance the results show the changes in absence patterns were not in the desired direction as although short-term sporadic absences decreased, there was an increase in longer term and medically certificated absences. Although this study is over thirty years old it is important within the field as few researchers have taken this methodological approach.

A more recent study by Balchin and Wooden (1995:55) was written from an economist's perspective, however one of their key findings remains relevant to this study:

the level of threat levied by the firm, and in turn the factors that impinge on the effectiveness of this threat, have a large impact on the absence decision

Horder (1999:267) states "*covert, negative messages are also conveyed in the campaign against absence: that staff are not to be trusted; that vulnerability is unacceptable; that conformity is required*". There is also a possibility that a focus on penalties may simply move the problem elsewhere such as higher employee turnover (Harvey and Nicholson, 1993). This approach would clearly be at odds with the policies of many organisations who are trying to take a positive approach to wellbeing. Punitive approaches may also raise issues of equity within the organisation (Harvey and Nicholson, 1993) which may de-motivate employees or cause tensions within work teams.

3.7.4.1.10. Training for line managers

Training is important as FLMs have an important responsibility for operationalising policies, which is described by Truss (2001:1139) as "*the role of the line manager as mediator between formal policy and individual experiences*". Accordingly, training is a fundamentally important aspect of the role of FLMs in managing absence and in the past this has not always been seen as a priority (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995). In addition there is a need for training to be provided on both hard and soft areas of HRM (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995:9) to enable the FLMs to carry out their roles (Acas, 2006). There is evidence in the work of Lawler and Hackman (1969) that employee and management involvement in designing the training programmes on encouraging attendance may lead to a reduction in absences, presumably because it would be more likely to meet their specific needs.

Cabinet Office (2004) discusses the three pronged approach to be used for training line managers: the use of the system; the procedures to be followed and developing the skills needed to carry out the procedures effectively. However, a further difficulty for organisations appears to be the lack of interest by FLMs in attending such training courses (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002).

3.7.4.1.11. Senior management commitment

General HR literature has indicated that senior management commitment to new HR policies and procedures is important, particularly where this commitment is visible to employees (Huselid, 1995 and Dibben et al., 2001c). Bennett's (2002) research confirms the importance of senior management commitment to managing absence. This means senior managers should consistently present the message about managing absence being important for the organisation and demonstrating their commitment to the policies and procedures. This was also an important variable uncovered by Seccombe (1995) and McHugh (2002) and later confirmed in Cabinet Office (2004).

3.7.4.1.12. Additional factors involved in managing absence

There is evidence of an increasing number of organisations offering proactive services to try to improve the health and wellbeing of their employees (Gilbreath and Montesino, 2006; BITC, 2007 and Baptiste, 2008), as well as reducing their absence levels. One example is the provision of access to private medical treatment which been successful in a number of instances (Wilkinson, 2006), and the data available to date suggests effective business cases could be presented. For example; BITC (2007) introduce a case study on Parcel Force Worldwide, who saved £6 million in direct savings after an investment of £2.25 million to support the health and wellbeing of their employees. Less expensive options used include guidance on fitness and wellbeing issues; subsidised exercise class rates; the provision of healthy food options in work canteens and blood pressure testing (Robson, 2008a). At present there is only evidence of a limited number of organisations taking this approach but it is anticipated that take-up rates will increase in the future (BITC, 2007).

The introduction of Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) is becoming more prominent in organisations (Alker and McHugh, 2002), particularly large organisations (Highley and Cooper, 1994) and evidenced in the increasing number of academic articles being published in this area. In addition to their attempt to reduce absenteeism, there may be other benefits such as creating goodwill to employees who believe that they are being supported by the organisation (De Groot and Kiker, 2003). Although there are studies which have evaluated the impact of EAPs, Highley and Cooper (1994) report a number of potential limitations for academics in conducting effective evaluations; confidentiality issues; gaining access to organisations and EAP providers and finding appropriate research designs to analyse them appropriately.

Contemporary research undertaken by Taimela et al. (2008:239) investigated whether different groups of employees should receive different types of support from the organisation depending on whether they were considered to be “*high risk of work disability and subsequent absenteeism*”. The research offers evidence that providing additional support to this group of employees reduced levels of absence by 11 days over a one year period. As this was part of a longitudinal study using control groups, the results can be accepted with a high level of confidence and would be worthy of future testing in different contexts.

Whilst Occupational Health interventions can be successful there are concerns raised in some studies about their ambiguous role (James et al., 2002) and a lack of clarity in who they are trying to support; the employee; the organisation, or both. In some organisations there is also evidence that this resource is not used as effectively as it could be, and in some cases, is being used as a threat to employees. It also needs to be acknowledged that many SMEs do not have access to occupational health services (Black, 2008).

3.7.4.1.13. Current absence management interventions: A summary

It is clear from the review of research presented within this section that a multi-pronged approach is required. There is no one prescriptive approach or recipe for organisations to follow (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002). It is up to individual organisations and managers to analyse the unique features of their absence problem (Johnson et al., 2003) and introduce the most appropriate interventions to meet their specific needs.

Categories of absence interventions can be broken down into: procedural measures; preventative work-oriented measures; preventative person-oriented measures and reintegration measures according to Johnson et al. (2003) which is based on their published review of literature in the field. Table 11 defines the possible interventions for each category and reflects the breadth of interventions that are available.

Table 11 Absence interventions identified by Johnson et al. (2003: 341)

Procedural measures	Preventative work-oriented measures	Preventative person-oriented measures	Reintegration measures
Monitoring absences	Health and safety initiatives	Counselling	Rehabilitation procedures
Absence policies	Management training	Information on bullying	Phased re-integration
Absence procedures	Better organisation of work	Stress management	Reduction of working hours
	Flexible working hours	Manual handling training	Return-to-work interviews
	Job enrichment		Physiotherapy treatment

Although general communication has not been discussed explicitly in relation to the potential impact on levels of absence, it is clear that effective communication is required to fulfil many of the interventions such as return-to-work interviews and monitoring absence (Dibben et al., 2001a). This includes ensuring all stakeholders are aware of their responsibilities in the managing absence process (Hayday et al., 2007). If this is not communicated sufficiently it is unlikely that the absence policy will be effective. Senior managers also need to communicate regularly the importance of managing absence to the FLMs (Robson, 2007a) as confirmed in the review by Cabinet Office (2004:10) which states: “*We need to find ways of keeping absence management at the top of the management and efficiency agendas*”. An emerging theme appears to be the perceived gap between the absence and HR policies that exist and how they are operationalised in the reality of normal working life (Cunningham et al., 2004) which may also be described as rhetoric versus reality.

3.7.4.2. Variables related to 'FLMs' knowledge of absence' and levels of sickness absence

In their research into three public sector organisations, Harris et al. (2002:222) report that their FLM respondents were concerned about their knowledge and capability in applying organisational HR policies:

Line managers in all three organisations expressed concern at the level of specialist expertise they felt was needed to tackle the increased complexity surrounding many HR issues.

It is suggested that this would be particularly relevant to absence management because of the different legislation and related policies that are involved (Harris et al., 2002). Looking specifically at absence management, a common theme throughout this review has been the need for FLMs to have a sound understanding of the importance of absence management and the role they have to play within it. McHugh (2002) believes FLMs often encounter problems in managing absence due to the fact that they are not knowledgeable about the absence policy. It is also important the FLMs have an appreciation of how the absence management policy is related to other HR policies (Bond and Wise, 2003) so it can be managed holistically in line with good practice (ANAO, 2003).

The reported reasons for FLMs not executing all of their jobs successfully are quite consistent between studies including lack of awareness of organisational policies (Cunningham et al., 2006) and time (James et al., 2002). Research by Dibben et al. (2001a) also includes excerpts from interviewees who describe instances where HR staff intervened when the FLMs were not able to perform their duties appropriately. Bennett (2002) also uncovered confusion over who was responsible – HR or FLMs? Other difficulties regarding managers were their inadequate understanding of the cost of handling absence cases incorrectly (Cunningham et al., 2006:221) and insufficient skills in dealing with sensitive situations (Cunningham et al., 2006:221).

Dibben et al. (2001a) believe ambiguity exists in organisations regarding who is responsible for the different segments involved in managing absence and this was confirmed in the later Local Authority-based research of Robson (2007b). Bennett's (2002) research with FLMs in Local Authorities situated in Northern

Ireland was particularly interesting because within the focus groups the researcher established that whilst some of the respondents stated they had a good understanding of the policy, few of them were actually able to demonstrate this knowledge.

Work by McHugh (2001:57) is clear about the holistic nature of effective absence management in stating:

The adoption of a holistic approach towards the issue of employee absence and its management is likely to foster improved organizational health

It is therefore appropriate to include the variable of FLMs' knowledge of associated HR policies and procedures within this study. Acas (2006) and Robson (2008b) agree that absence management needs to be integrated with other HR issues and policies such as discipline and grievance. Despite the importance of a holistic approach being advocated by researchers, evidence suggests that failure to manage absence holistically remains an outstanding issue, as Bennett's (2002:436) findings suggested that absence was seen as "*a distinct issue, separate from other aspects of organisational functioning*". This implies a gap occurs between the rhetoric and reality of effective absence management.

As a consequence of the research and literature which has been analysed, the variables of knowledge of absence management policies and procedures; and knowledge of associated HR policies and procedures will be tested as hypotheses within this Doctoral study,

3.7.4.3. Variables related to 'FLMs' confidence in managing absence' and levels of sickness absence

Looking specifically at FLMs in organisations, there is one final set of variables where there is evidence of an association with levels of sickness absence which are summarised under the title of 'FLMs' confidence in managing absence' within this category, the following issues are highlighted; attitudes towards managing absence; confidence in carrying out role in managing absence; confidence in applying HR policies; and conscientiousness in applying policies and procedures.

Existing literature derived from empirical studies and best practice position papers, are clear that FLMs need to have a positive attitude towards managing absence (Johnson et al, 2003). This would include understanding the size and the nature of the problem and treating absence management as an important part of their role within the organisation. One of the problems of FLMs having devolved responsibilities for HR tasks is considered to be their preference for experiential learning (Brewster and Larsen, 1992). In part this preference may be due to the fact that the FLMs do not see the need for formal training, and are often not keen to participate (Cunningham et al, 2004).

Looking at the roles of FLMs it is clear that knowledge of HR and absence policies and practices alone is not sufficient and it is the way in which they implement them that can make a difference (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003). This suggests the issue of confidence in enacting the relevant policies and procedures should be considered. The confidence levels of FLMs in managing the absence process are highlighted by Dibben et al. (2001a) and Hayday et al. (2007) which justify its inclusion as one of the key variables to be investigated within this study. Peach Martins (2007) suggests that the main cause of low confidence in FLMs is when they do not have clarity in their role, and the role of others in the absence management process.

As discussed in the previous section, absence management is most successful when it is part of a holistic approach to HRM (McHugh, 2001), meaning it should be embedded into associated HR policies. Building on the earlier work of Dibben et al. (2001a), who reinforced the importance of FLMs having confidence in carrying out their absence management role, it is also deemed a logical progression that they need to be confident in carrying out their role in associated HR areas.

A link is also proposed between the confidence of the FLMs in order to be conscientious in carrying out their absence management duties. This will also help to examine the assertion made in existing research that FLMs often use a common sense approach to many HR tasks (Bond and McCracken, 2005) and fail to follow organisational policies and procedures (Renwick, 2003). This also links back to the requirement for absence to be managed consistently, so that there can be no accusations of favourable or unfavourable treatment by the FLMs.

3.8. Summary: Potential characteristics of FLMS required to manage absence effectively

Within this review associations have been made between the characteristics, of FLMS which may have an association with the absence levels of their subordinates. Due to the lack of closely-aligned research in this area it was necessary to extend the review outside the general field of absence. Conversely, this provides a strong opportunity for this research to enhance the existing body of knowledge by taking a holistic approach. A variety of different areas and perspectives have been drawn from (i.e. psychology, health management and public sector management) to demonstrate some of the key points, such as the importance of knowledge of the absence management and wider policies and procedures. It is the review of this section of the literature which has been the driving force for the key hypotheses for this study. This section is crucially important in being able to answer the principal research question of this Doctoral study: *What are the characteristics of FLMS required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?* Five key themes have been identified from this review to address the research question that guides this study:

1. The personal characteristics of FLMS
2. The organisational characteristics in which the FLMS work
3. General work attitudes of the FLMS
4. The FLMS' knowledge of absence
5. The FLMS' confidence in managing absence

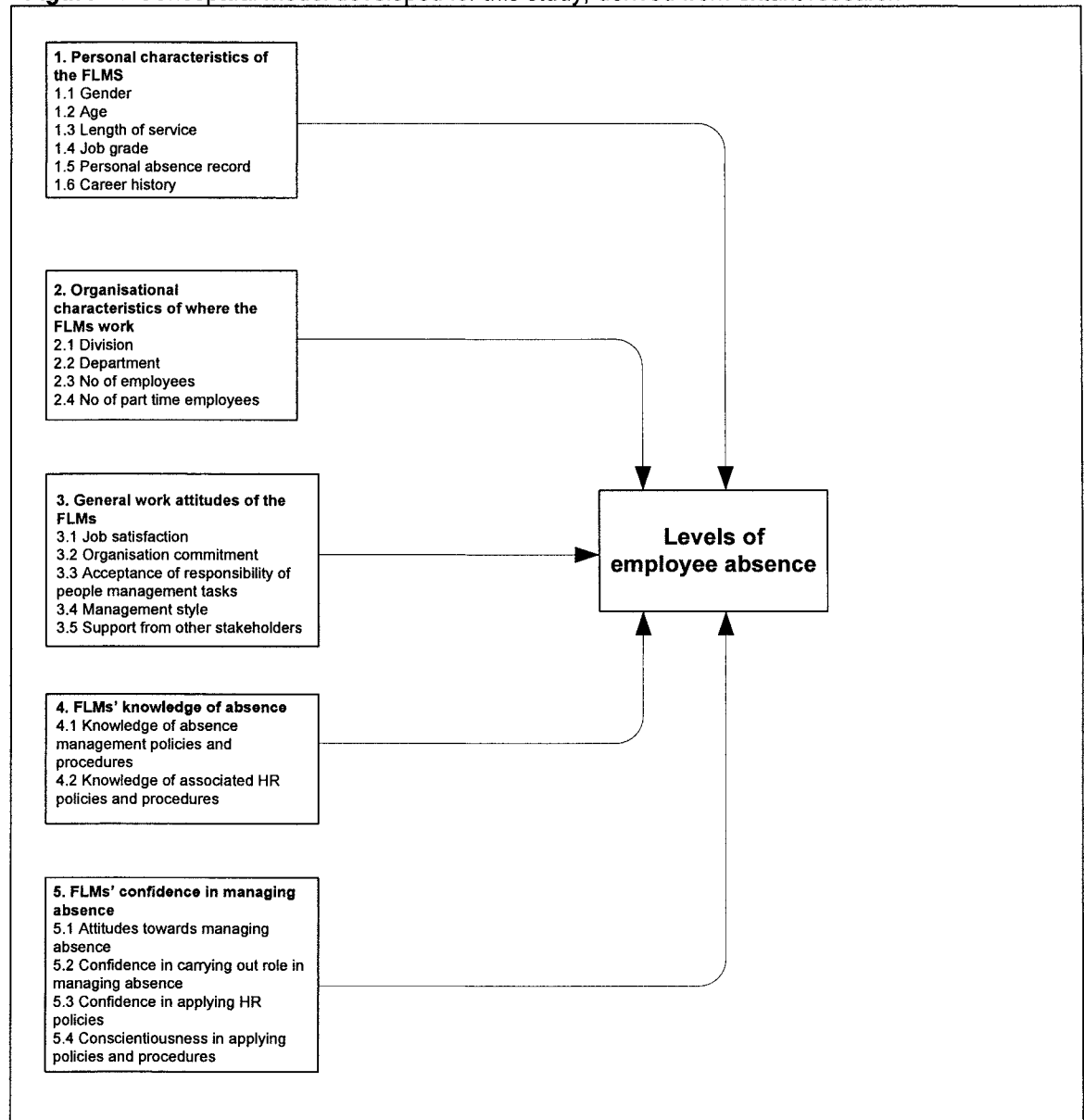
Table 12 provides a concise summary of the existing research which has provided the variables utilised in previous research, and they will be used together to test the theory for this Doctoral research.

Table 12 Summary of sources of extant research which guided the hypotheses for this study.

Hypotheses	Source of extant research
Personal characteristics of the FLMs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Age • Length of service • Job grade • Personal absence record • Career history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moore et al (2005) • Hales (2005) • Horder (1999) • Lambert et al. (2005) • Kristensen et al. (2006) • Bolton (2003) • Leishman and Savage (1993) • Loo and Thorpe (2004)
Organisational characteristics of where the FLMs work. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Division • Department • Number of employees • Number of part time employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIPD (2008b) • CBI (2008) • Smulders (1983) • Doran et al. (2004) • Winkler (1980) • Tuffin (2001) • Drago and Wooden (1992)
General work attitudes of the FLMs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job satisfaction • Organisation commitment • Acceptance of responsibility for people management tasks • Management style • Support from other stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mowday et al (1982) • Bennett (2002) • Richmond et al. (1983) • Cunningham et al. (2004) • Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) • Renwick (2003) • Peach Martins (2007) • Argyle et al. (1958) • James et al. (2002) • Larsen and Brewster (2003)
FLMs' knowledge of absence management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of absence management policies and procedures • Knowledge of associated HR policies and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McHugh (2002) • Bennett (2002) • Dibben et al. (2001a) • Robson (2008b) • McHugh (2001)
FLMs' confidence in managing absence Attitudes towards managing absence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence in carrying out role in managing absence • Confidence in applying HR policies • Conscientiousness in applying policies and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Johnson et al. (2003) • Dibben et al. (2001a) • Hayday et al. (2007) • Bond and McCracken (2005)

This led to the generation of the hypotheses and sub-hypotheses which are tested to answer the research question for this study. The conceptual model is presented below in Figure 27.

Figure 27 Conceptual model developed for this study, derived from extant research



Whilst the conceptual model developed for this study is clearly empirically grounded in the identification of the variables, it is also evident that this study is moving the knowledge base forwards by amalgamating theories from a variety of authors rather than simply replicating a single piece of existing work. It is hypothesised that the five key themes which have been translated into five hypotheses and 21 sub-hypotheses will have an association with the levels of absence of the FLMS' subordinates. For example, in testing sub-hypothesis 3.4, this research aims to investigate whether an association exists between the management style of FLMS and the levels of absence of their subordinates.

3.9. Identifying the gap in the theoretical research base

This Doctoral research addresses a number of gaps in the existing knowledge base, concerning absence in the UK public sector. The concept of 'new public management' (NPM) has led to widespread changes throughout the public sector, many of which have a direct impact on the roles of FLMs and the ways in which they carry out their jobs. Despite this, Butterfield et al. (2005:330) believe *"the role of first line managers remains largely unexplored"*.

In relation to managing sickness absence, this review of the current theory base has identified a number of studies emphasising the important role played by FLMs, yet there appears to be little corroborating evidence. Van Dierendonck et al. (2002:84) states:

Only a few studies have explicitly investigated the role of the direct supervisor as an important influence. In the management literature, the importance of supervisory, or leadership, behaviour as a potential cause of subordinate absenteeism is widely emphasized. However, only a few empirical studies support this premise.

A further argument is that one of the contributions made by this doctoral study revolves around the use of content analysis on absence and related HR policies and procedures. Johns (2003:174) confirms: *"it is very, very rare to find diverse methods used within the same overall study"*.

3.10. Methodological issues in absence research

Johns' (2003) advice to absence researchers is the necessity of choosing research methods which correspond to the research question being used. This implies there is no one best method to employ when conducting absence research. A fundamental issue in absence research appears to be with the data collected, Hammer and Landau (1981:574) state:

the deviation from normality found in most samples of absence data place severe limitations on the use of statistical analyses in hypothesis testing and on the interpretations that can be made from such analyses.

This means appropriate statistical tests should be used which do not require the data to be normally distributed (Watson et al., 1985). Measuring absence in organisations is acknowledged as a multivariate problem (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998) and this raises several issues, Durand (1985) believes that as a consequence, much absence research should come with a caveat attached to it. This will be reflected in this Doctoral research by being realistic about how the results can be interpreted and the way that they are generalised. There appears to be no consensus over the most desirable absence monitoring period and whether this should be months or years (Steel et al. 2007). This is unfortunate as Hackett (1989) suggests this is a potentially moderating variable in the absence-attendance relationship. Johns (2003:166) also believes there are limitations of individual studies *"including low base rates, difficult distributional parties, and marginal reliabilities"*. This infers that even in a well designed research project, there may be limitations the researcher cannot overcome. This should be reflected in the discussion of the methodology and research methods employed.

As discussed previously within Section 2 which reviewed ways that absences are measured, there is potential for inaccuracies throughout the research process. The ways in which absence data are treated is an important issue as typically there will be a non-normal distribution (Durand, 1985) but this is not always taken into account when calculating the statistics. This is a notable issue as seasonality trends can have a big impact on levels of absence (Akyeampong, 2007). In relation to the seasonality of data it is recommended that absence figures should be obtained for at least a twelve month period but preferably longer (Johns, 2003). There is a high chance that if absence data are not treated appropriately they can be skewed providing potentially misleading results and subsequent conclusions (Watson et al., 1985). Organisations may find that their absence levels are skewed by the long term absences of a small number of individuals which dramatically increases the average number of days lost due to absence. This concept of outliers is highlighted by Watson et al. (1985) who urged future researchers to consider eliminating extreme measures to provide a more representative statistic. The authors (Watson et al., 1985) also argue the outlier values that are eliminated or ignored could be investigated in their own right.

Avery and Hotz (1984:159) state:

the process of generating absences at the individual level is not generally found to be static; the likelihood of an individual being absent is apt to change over time due to changes in the work environment or as function of a worker's past work (or absence) history.

This suggests that the results from absence research will not necessarily be generalisable and they may be subject to change rather easily. This should be acknowledged by researchers, case study organisations and subsequent readers of the research.

3.11. Discussion

This chapter has presented a strong argument that managing absence should be a priority for organisations due to the costs (financial and non-financial) associated with it, as well as the benefits of having a healthy workforce.

The vital role of FLMs has been explored, including a brief introduction to the devolvement of HR tasks to these roles in organisation. This set the scene in terms of FLMs managing absence by addressing some of the general as well as absence-specific issues that they may encounter.

It is apparent that absence management is not a new problem and that in some respects, the literature has not diversified significantly since the 1970s and the frequently referred to models of Nicholson (1977) and Steers and Rhodes (1978). In addition to potentially broadening these two classic models, the clear contribution to knowledge of this study is through the investigation of the specific characteristics of FLMs which may be required to manage absence effectively.

In addition to the exploration of the role and characteristics of FLMs, and the study of absence management as a topic area, this chapter has also highlighted the vital role played by the absence management policy (Cabinet Office, 2004; Hayday et al., 2007; CIPD, 2007b and McHugh, 2002)). This has included why it is needed to support the role of FLMs as well as an overview of what it needs to contain. This drove one of the research methods utilised within this study; an analysis of the case organisation's absence management policies and procedures. A further issue that was highlighted is the need for absence to be managed as part of a holistic process as recommended by McHugh (2001) as HR practices are usually most effective when used together (Baptiste, 2008).

This concept will be tested within the current Doctoral research by examining organisational documents for evidence of their links to the absence management policies, procedures and practices.

It is clear from the evidence presented that research has consistently shown FLMS play an important role in the managing absence management process (James et al., 2002 and Cunningham et al., 2006). The five key themes have led to the generation of a set of hypotheses that will be tested within this study as illustrated earlier in Figure 27 and form the key contribution to knowledge that is offered by this study.

The next chapter presents the research framework which was employed within this Doctoral study to address the overall research question and key objectives of this study. It also demonstrates how the conceptual model for this study will be tested through the use of hypotheses and sub-hypotheses. An additional common thread between this chapter and Chapter Four surrounds the investigation of the previous research methodologies employed in absence research.

Chapter Four

Research Framework

4.1. Aims of chapter

This chapter begins by exploring the ontological and epistemological route taken in this research, before discussing the methodology and research methods in more detail. Within each research method a rationale is provided for why it was considered the most appropriate alongside the protocol arrangements for sampling and pilot studies. Links are also made with the methodologies and methods used in previous studies on absenteeism and public sector management research.

Data analysis is considered in detail for each of the research methods to show how the information was analysed and interpreted and confirm the advantages and limitations of the approaches. This includes a discussion of the inferences that can be drawn from the different data analysis techniques. Attention is also paid to testing the reliability of the data, including reference to the techniques employed. The limitations of this study are provided before the chapter concludes by considering the appropriate range of ethical issues.

4.2. Research question and objectives

One of the prime aims of this chapter is to illustrate how the methods used will enable the testing of the research question and the fulfilment of the key objectives of this study. The research question which guides this study is: *What are the characteristics of FLMs required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?* To answer this research question a positivist and quantitative methodology has been used. The objectives of this study have also been considered throughout the research design process, and are reiterated in Figure 28.

Figure 28 Objectives of this study

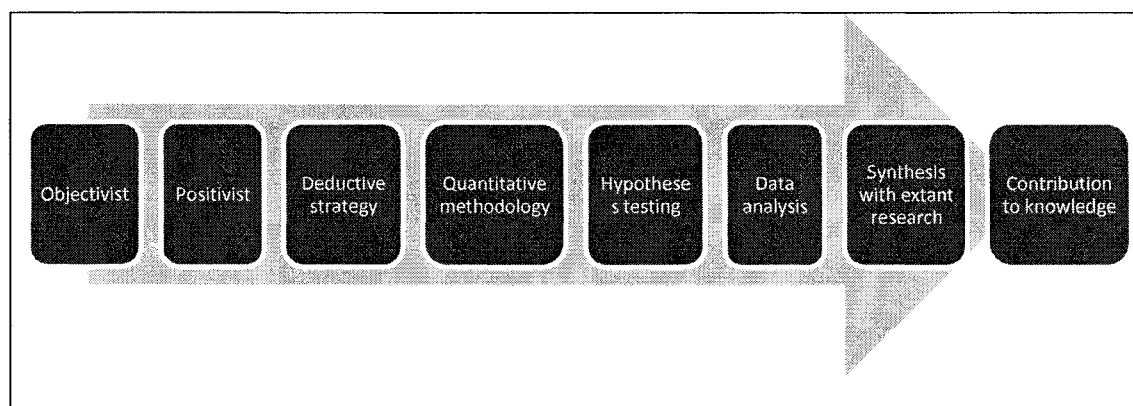
- To establish the characteristics of FLMs required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations by involving FLMs in primary research.
- To review literature in relation to the effective management of absence, and approaches in the public sector to establish a gap of existing knowledge.
- To investigate how absence should be managed holistically through an analysis of the organisation's absence management policies, to support the role played by FLMs.

Figure 28 Objectives of this study (continued)

- To design and implement an appropriate methodology and quantitative methods to establish the characteristics of FLMs required to 'effectively' manage absence.
- To analyse the data and synthesise extant research in order to progress the current theory base and enable an original contribution to knowledge.

The subsequent sections of this chapter demonstrate consistency and rigour in the approach to the research design which is appropriate to the research philosophy. An overview of the overall research approach is illustrated in Figure 29.

Figure 29 Overview of research approach



4.3. Epistemology

Hughes and Sharrock (1990:1) are clear about the importance of philosophy within research projects:

Philosophical issues continually provide the fundamental questions these disciplines ask about the nature of their appropriate subject matters, their intellectual provenance, their investigative rationales, and above all about the nature of their valid and proper methods.

It is clearly important to consider the philosophy and its implications throughout the process, and not merely at the beginning when deciding which one is the most appropriate for the individual study. This should enhance the standing of the research and may increase the perception of its validity.

The current Doctoral study on absenteeism comes from the objectivist perspective which Crotty (2005:5) defines as:

The epistemological view that things exist as meaningful entities independently of consciousness and experience, that they have truth and meaning residing in them as objects and that careful research can attain that objective truth and meaning.

The key aims of an objectivist study are focused around the importance of being as detached as possible. This involves ensuring the research is carried out objectively and ultimately for the analysis and conclusions of the research to be recognised as being based on facts rather than subjective opinion and being generalisable and valid. However it is also accepted it is unlikely to be totally objective and all researchers are likely to subconsciously allow their opinions to shape their work in some way (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). This is particularly the case when working in an organisation for a significant amount of time when a working relationship with the key informants may inevitably develop. Crotty (2005:15) believes:

If we seek to be consistently objectivist, we will distinguish scientifically established objective meanings from subjective meanings that people hold in everyday fashion and that at best 'reflect' or 'mirror' or 'approximate' objective meanings.

The above quote reinforces the importance of scrutinising all of the information used and highlighting instances where this may not be verifiable. Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) emphasises the importance of 'value freedom' by investigating areas that have been selected using clearly defined and objective criteria rather than by the interests or beliefs of the researcher. This means that identifying themes from past studies which are empirically sound is appropriate. This objectivity can be audited through the research process by tracing the hypotheses and research to the review of the literature and analysis of secondary data. The need for the researcher to be independent from the research and the organisation is therefore logical to eliminate biases, so the study can be undertaken in a neutral way. If this independence from the study and the organisation can be demonstrated consistently throughout the study the outcomes may be perceived as more valid (Hanson and Grimmer, 2007).

4.4. Theoretical perspective

This study comes from a positivist perspective which is described by Bryman and Bell (2003:14) as:

an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond.

As positivism is known to originate from the study of the natural sciences, it assumes when knowledge is obtained in a scientific way it is considered to be accurate and reliable (Robson, 2002). This appears to be a strong overarching claim however the principle is clear in identifying the strong importance of accuracy and reliability and therefore it is important this is considered continuously throughout the research design process, including the final data analysis.

Saunders et al. (2003:83) describe a researcher within the positivist tradition as someone who:

assumes the role of an objective analyst, coolly making detached interpretations about those data that have been conducted in an apparently value-free manner.

Lee (1992) posits that there might be difficulties in proving that such a strict and detached approach had been taken as ambiguities may arise in different elements of the research design and data collection. Furthermore, Baker (2003:13) believes: *“in that research is a human activity it is inevitable that to some degree it will be influenced by the experience and behaviour of the researcher”*.

The subject of the positivist theoretical perspective has received considerable attention from a wide range of authors (including Lee, 1992; Weber, 2004 and Easterby-Smith et al., 2008) with a particular focus on defining the ‘normal’ characteristics of positivist studies. Whilst a definitive checklist does not exist there have been some common criteria that have been generated.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) highlight the importance of generalisation within a positivist study. Large samples are usually needed in order to be generalised across the wider population, though there are different ways to view a population so this must be clearly defined. An advantage of a positivist approach is that the large amounts of data produced may be useful to policy decisions and provide a stronger rationale for action (Saunders et al., 2006).

Within this Doctoral study a decision was made at the research design stage as to how this work would aim to be generalised. After careful consideration and a review of the absence records of all of the Divisions across GMBC, the decision was made to compare and contrast two separate divisions using a purposive sampling method. The 'lowest' and 'highest' performing Divisions were identified by using the criteria of the highest and lowest average levels of absence over the three year period. This aimed to facilitate generalisability with other UK Local Authorities as Hales (2001:2) believes:

Local government employees in the UK largely undertake or support the statutory functions with similar employment groupings between geographical areas.

However, when using a single organisation as the basis for the research study this clearly still raises a potential concern regarding the wider generalisability. This is acknowledged as a potential limitation of this research and is explored in more detail in section 4.11.

A deductive approach was used for this study whereby the research involves testing theories rather than aiming to construct new ones; whereby the research moves from the theory to the data (Bryman and Bell, 2003). As a positivistic study, the hypotheses were generated following the review of existing research, which identified the key themes. In keeping with the research philosophy the hypotheses are presented using a "formal and rhetorical style" (Collis and Hussey, 2003:126). Within both the positivist and deductive traditions, there is a need to operationalise concepts so they can be measured. This was achieved at the beginning of the review of extant literature by discussing the different terminology associated with sickness absence. Further concepts that have been operationalised and defined include job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

There are however some criticisms of the positivist paradigm. It could be argued the methods employed tend to be inflexible and rather artificial as they are usually in a fixed design which is highly structured to ensure it is seen as vigorous and reliable. There is also a need to ensure that everything can be measured so the study can be replicated and valid. Sarantakos (2005) believes this approach limits the variety and extent of the research as it is only conducted in areas where there is evidence of a potential link. Therefore, these authors are implying that if all research came from the positivist perspective, very few new theories would be generated as there would be few explorations carried out.

The current study attempts to address this potential limitation of lack of new theories by synthesising literature from a number of inter-related fields including psychology, health management and public policy. This type of amalgamation is new to the field of absence management and brings a new perspective. Crotty (2005:29) considers one of the weaknesses of this perspective is the potential assumption that the data and knowledge gained is automatically valid because of the scientific procedures, and only knowledge and data gained in this way can be accurate. This perspective would clearly not be appropriate for all types of research projects, which reinforces the importance of considering each research study as unique.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2002:42) argue: *“most of the data gathered will not be relevant to real decisions although it may be used to support the covert goals of decision makers”*. This may be quite a serious limitation within organisational research and raises the issue of the researcher clarifying expectations with the organisation so they understand what the likely outcomes (and the format of) the research findings will be. In this instance, the organisation is aware of the positivist nature of the outcomes and agreed this research would still provide a useful tool from their perspective.

4.5. Methodological approach

The theoretical perspective has a key role to play in the design of the methodology and research methods. There is no one, right methodology which is summarised well by Crotty (2005:1) who states methodologies and methods *“may appear more as a maze than as pathways to orderly research”*.

As a starting point the strategies used by previous researchers were analysed. This also identified known methodological problems, such as those discussed by Hammer and Landau (1981) and Martocchio and Harrison (1993) which were explored in Chapter Three. Ackroyd and Thompson (1999:13) suggest the key limitation of the research into absenteeism is that by its very nature it is difficult to physically observe any behaviours, and go on to comment: *"the most prevalent activity in much research into absenteeism involves poring over documents"*. Although the methodology used in previous studies may be interesting and worthy of evaluation, it remains vital to select the methodology and methods which are the most appropriate for each unique study and which will address the key research question.

As a research strategy this PhD study uses a quantitative methodology. This is deemed appropriate because of the objectivist perspective adopted for this study and the strong emphasis placed upon measurement, causality, generalisation and replication (Bryman and Bell, 2003). In addition it is suitable because the key issues surrounding absenteeism are known, and therefore relevant hypotheses have been drawn from the literature. An advantage of this approach is quantitative methods are *"usually regarded as more robust, leading to actionable results and recommendations"* (Baker, 2003:21). An additional benefit of this type of strategy is the possibility of generating factual and descriptive information, which de Vaus (2002:5) describes as *'hard evidence'*. An anticipated outcome is that the results may be more readily accepted, and it will be easier to provide generalisations. The need for a consistent research strategy is reinforced, as one of the key outputs of generalisable research has been referred to throughout the research design.

4.6. Development of hypotheses

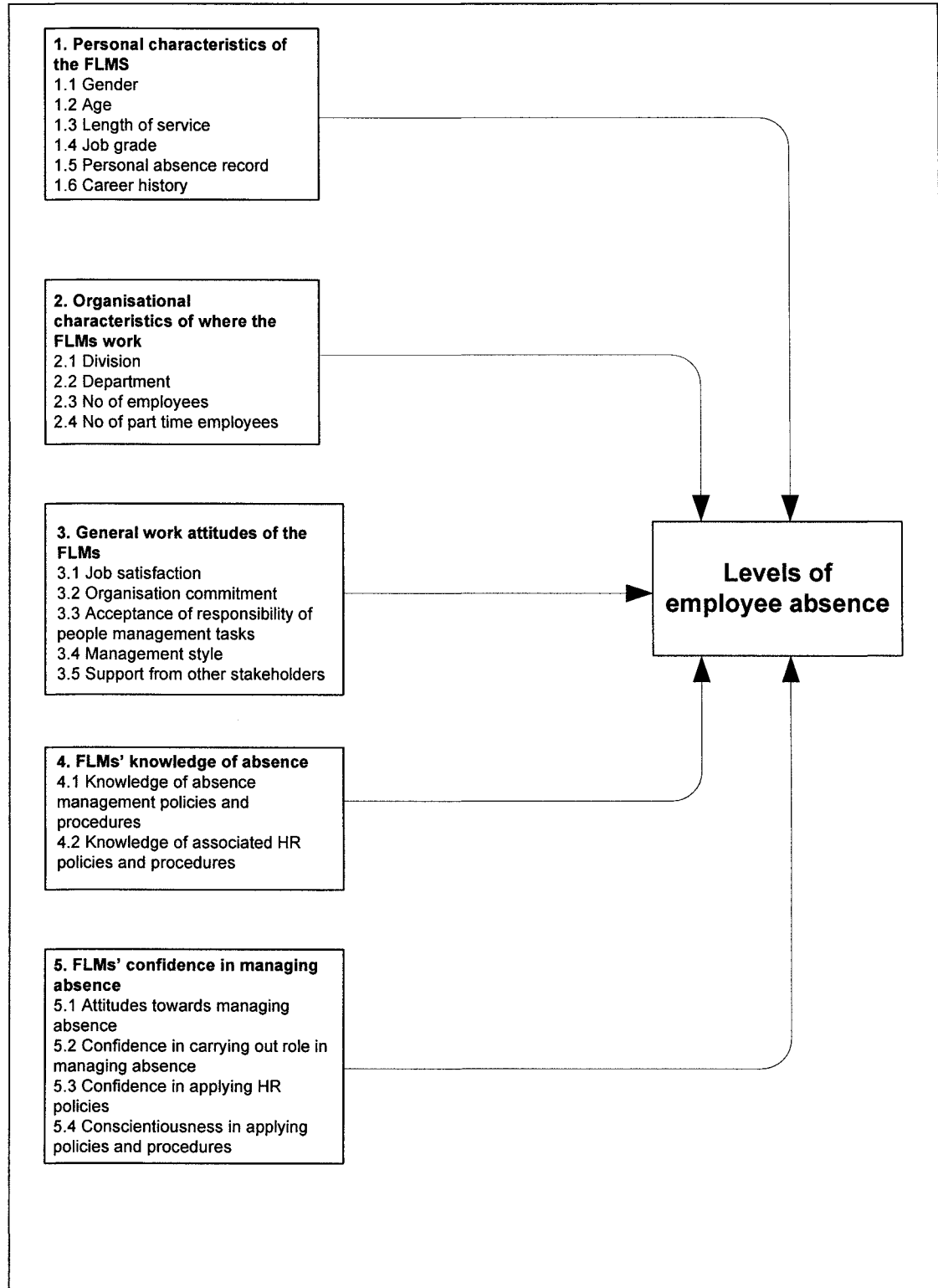
"A hypothesis is an idea or proposition which can be tested for association or causality using statistics" (Collis and Hussey 2003: 123). Balnaves and Caputi (2001) define the meaning of hypotheses further by identifying two types: correlational and causal. With the variables and data types employed in this study correlational relationships will be tested. This is appropriate as this study aims to *"be an instrumental part of problem resolution"* (O'Leary, 2005: 4) which facilitates decision making rather than providing a definitive solution.

This remains consistent with the existing work in the field. Within this positivistic study, the hypotheses are central to the work and were generated following extensive review of the available research. Due to the fact the specific area of the role of FLMS has not been investigated in depth before, a wide frame of reference was used within the literature review, utilising sources from a range of discipline areas. Conversely this was interpreted as an opportunity to make a distinctive original contribution to knowledge.

From the extant research five key themes emerged which are relevant to the stated aims of this study. These themes are: personal characteristics of FLMS; organisational characteristics of where the FLMS work; general work attitudes of FLMS; knowledge of absence management and associated HR policies of the FLMS; and the confidence of FLMS in managing absence.

The overarching hypothesis for this thesis is **the characteristics of FLMS required to 'effectively' manage absence may have an association with the absence levels of their employees**. This model has been translated into five research questions which provide the five principal hypotheses of this study. The hypotheses have been tested thoroughly through this research by the design and analysis of appropriate sub-hypotheses. The conceptual model developed for this study is shown in Figure 30 and is followed by the presentation of all five hypotheses and 21 corresponding sub-hypotheses.

Figure 30 Conceptual model for this study



4.6.1. Hypothesis One

The research question which guides the hypothesis is ***Does an association exist between the personal characteristics of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees?*** In line with the summary of extant research which is presented in Table 12, the work of the following authors was used to drive these hypotheses: Moore et al (2005); Hales (2005); Horder (1999); Lambert et al. (2005); Kristensen et al. (2006); Bolton (2003); Leishman and Savage (1993) and Loo and Thorpe (2004). The following hypothesis is tested within this study:

H₀ No association exists between the personal characteristics of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.

H₁ An association does exist between the personal characteristics of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.

To test this hypothesis a set of sub-hypotheses were created as shown in Table 13.

Table 13 Sub-hypotheses for first hypothesis

1.1	H ₀ :	No difference exists between the gender of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	A difference does exist between the gender of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
1.2	H ₀ :	No difference exists between the age of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	A difference does exist between the age of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
1.3	H ₀ :	No association exists between the length of service of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the length of service of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
1.4	H ₀ :	No association exists between the job grade of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the job grade of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
1.5	H ₀ :	No association exists between the personal absence record of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the personal absence record of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
1.6	H ₀ :	No association exists between the career history of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the career history of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.

4.6.2. Hypothesis Two

The research question which guides the hypothesis is ***Does an association exist between the organisational characteristics of where the FLMs work and the levels of absence of their employees?*** Previous work by CIPD (2008b); CBI (2008); Smulders, (1983); Doran et al. (2004); Winkler (1980); Tuffin (2001); and Drago and Wooden (1992) was used to develop the hypothesis and sub-hypotheses. The following hypothesis is tested within this study:

H₀ No association exists between **the organisational characteristics of where the FLMs work** and the levels of absence of their employees.

H₁ An association does exist between **the organisational characteristics of where the FLMs work** and the levels of absence of their employees.

To test this hypothesis a set of sub-hypotheses were created as shown in Table 14.

Table 14 Sub-hypotheses for second hypothesis

2.1	H ₀ :	No difference exists between the division in which the FLMs work and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	A difference does exist between the division in which the FLMs work and the levels of absence of their employees.
2.2	H ₀ :	No difference exists between the department in which the FLMs work and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	A difference does exist between the department in which the FLMs work and the levels of absence of their employees.
2.3	H ₀ :	No association exists between the total number of employees managed by FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the total number of employees managed by FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
2.4	H ₀ :	No association exists between the total number of part-time employees managed by FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the total number of part-time employees managed by FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees.

4.6.3. Hypothesis Three

The research question which guides the hypothesis is ***Does an association exist between the general work attitudes of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees?*** A number of authors' work was used to identify hypothesis three and then construct appropriate sub-hypotheses: Mowday et al. (1982; Bennett (2002); Richmond et al. (1983); Cunningham et al. (2004); Hutchinson and Purcell (2003); Renwick (2003); Peach Martins (2007); Argyle et al (2002); James et al. (2002); and Larsen and Brewster (2003). The following hypothesis is tested within this study:

H₀ No association exists between the **general work attitudes of FLMs**, and the levels of absence of their employees

H₁ An association does exist between the **general work attitudes of FLMs**, and the levels of absence of their employees.

To test this hypothesis a set of sub-hypotheses were created as shown in Table 15.

Table 15 Sub-hypotheses for third hypothesis

3.1	H ₀ :	No association exists between the levels of job satisfaction of FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the levels of job satisfaction of FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.
3.2	H ₀ :	No association exists between the levels of organisation commitment of FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the levels of organisation commitment of FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.
3.3	H ₀ :	No association exists between the extent to which FLMs accept their people management responsibilities , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the extent to which FLMs accept their people management responsibilities , and the levels of absence of their employees.
3.4	H ₀ :	No association exists between the management style of FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the management style of FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.

Table 15 Sub-hypotheses for third hypothesis (continued)

3.5	H ₀ :	No association exists between the levels of support received by FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the levels of support received by FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.

4.6.4. Hypothesis Four

The research question which guides the hypothesis is ***Does an association exist between the knowledge of absence and associated HR policies of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees?*** Using the research of McHugh (2002); Bennett (2002); Dibben et al. (2001a); Robson (2008b) and McHugh (2001a) facilitated the generation of the testable hypothesis and sub-hypotheses. The following hypothesis is tested within this study:

H₀ No association exists between the **knowledge of absence and associated HR policies of FLMs**, and the levels of absence of their employees.

H₁ An association does exist between the **knowledge of absence and associated HR policies of FLMs**, and the levels of absence of their employees.

To test this hypothesis a set of sub-hypotheses were created as shown in Table 16.

Table 16 Sub-hypotheses for fourth hypothesis

4.1	H ₀ :	No association exists between the level of knowledge of absence management policies and procedures of FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the level of knowledge of absence management policies and procedures of FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.
4.2	H ₀ :	No association exists between the level of knowledge of associated HR policies and procedures of FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the level of knowledge of associated HR policies and procedures of FLMs , and the levels of absence of their employees.

4.6.5. Hypothesis Five

The research question which guides the hypothesis is ***Does an association exist between the attitudes towards absence and associated HR policies of FLMs and the levels of absence of their employees?*** The review of the existing theory base which was presented in Chapter Three highlighted the work of Johnson et al. (2003); Dibben et al. (2001a); Hayday et al. (2007) and Bond and McCracken (2005) as being pertinent in the identifying the hypotheses and sub-hypotheses to be tested. The following hypothesis is tested within this study:

H₀ No association exists between the **attitudes of FLMs towards absence and HR associated policies**, and the levels of absence of their employees.

H₁ An association does exist between the **attitudes of FLMs towards absence and associated HR policies**, and the levels of absence of their employees.

To test this hypothesis a set of sub-hypotheses were created as shown in Table 17.

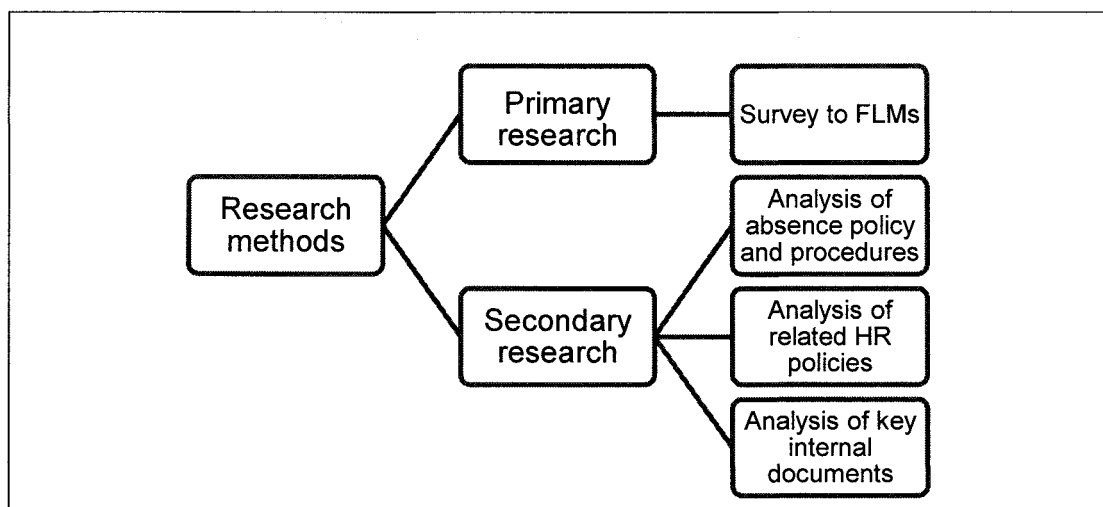
Table 17 Sub-hypotheses for fifth hypothesis

5.1	H ₀ :	No association exists between the attitudes of FLMs towards absence , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the attitudes of FLMs towards absence , and the levels of absence of their employees.
5.2	H ₀ :	No association exists between the confidence levels of FLMs in carrying out their role in managing absence , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the extent of confidence levels of FLMs in carrying out their role in managing absence , and the levels of absence of their employees.
5.3	H ₀ :	No association exists between the confidence levels of FLMs in applying related HR policies and procedures , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the confidence levels of FLMs in applying related HR policies and procedures , and the levels of absence of their employees.
5.4	H ₀ :	No association exists between the conscientiousness of FLMs in applying absence management policies and procedures , and the levels of absence of their employees.
	H ₁ :	An association does exist between the conscientiousness of FLMs in applying absence management policies and procedures , and the levels of absence of their employees.

4.7. Research Methods

The positivistic paradigm for this research had a substantial impact on the choice of methods considered to be appropriate for this study. Figure 31 identifies the methods selected and this is followed by a commentary on how each method was used. Lee (1993:19) believes: *“Applied social research by its nature concerns itself, therefore, with social problems, focusing its attention on the deviant, the problematic or the marginal”* and this research study appears to fit into this category as absence is often described as a organisational misbehaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). The sensitivities involved in researching an area such as absence were also considered as there was potentially a threat of sanction to the research participants (Lee,1993). For example; potential participants may be concerned they could be disciplined if they revealed evidence of poor practices in absence management. Although this was not considered to be a serious threat to the success of this study it was important to minimise perceptions of sanctions to try to encourage a large number of participants.

Figure 31 Research methods employed in the study



4.7.1. Surveys to FLMs

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to all of the FLMs within the two hotspot departments. The size of the estimated population was 225 FLMs and therefore it was considered to be acceptable to contact the whole population rather than use a sampling method. One of the first issues encountered was identifying who the FLMs were in order to be able to contact them to ask them to complete a questionnaire.

Initially hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed via the organisation's internal mail system and employees were asked to return their completed questionnaires in an attached pre-paid envelope, addressed directly to the researcher. This was followed up by electronic distribution of the same questionnaire which is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Self-administered surveys were chosen as they are less expensive to carry out than structured interviews, and it is possible to administer a larger number of them, which is of particular importance within a positivistic study. The format of a paper based questionnaire can also assure the respondents of their anonymity, whereas they may be more sceptical if they are taking part in a face to face interview. Within this research project not all of the participants were based in the same geographical location, which would have made it logistically complex to organise and carry out a large number of interviews. Questionnaires are also more convenient as they can be completed at the most suitable time for the respondents, which may increase the likelihood of them completing it. A final advantage is all potential participants receive the same information, and in the same order. Bryman (2001:41) states that: *"variation in people's responses can be attributed to genuine variations and not to divergences in the manner or order of asking questions"*.

Another strength of questionnaires is where they contain mostly closed questions, quantitative analysis can be performed at a level whereby it will be possible for non-experts to understand the key findings. This is particularly important in this type of research project, where a secondary audience is likely to be HR practitioners and public sector managers.

As with any research method, there are some potential disadvantages to using self-administered surveys. Perhaps the key weakness of this method is that participants are not able to gain instant clarification if they are unsure as to what a question means. This means it is essential the questions and the available responses are as unambiguous as possible, which highlights the requirement for careful piloting and pre-piloting of both the questionnaire and the accompanying instructions.

This is backed up further by the views of Robson (2002:231) who is very clear about the importance of designing an effective survey, and states: *“The reliability and validity of survey data depend to a considerable extent on the technical proficiency of those running the survey”*. On a practical level the researcher was unable to control the way the respondents completed the questionnaires, for example they could flick through the document and be influenced by later questions. Another potential issue is that it is not always possible to ascertain who has actually completed the questionnaire (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008); however this is a general issue when using questionnaires in primary research.

4.7.1.1. Survey design

Response rates of questionnaires have received considerable attention by researchers, principally in the quest to try and encourage response rates to be as high as possible. Baruch (1999) states there is no one universally recognised level of acceptable response rate, though his research which covered 175 academic studies found an average response rate of 55.6%, but with a standard deviation of 19.7 (Baruch, 1999:421). However, this benchmark is unrealistic for a Doctoral Study, as Baruch's work consisted of analysing articles from highly rated international journals, so a simple comparison with this work would be inappropriate.

The work of Edwards et al. (2002) suggests when the questions are of a sensitive nature they are less likely to be completed, and it is suggested questions on absenteeism could fall into this category. The research methods used by other UK-based absence researchers were evaluated, but overall they do not provide any consistent benchmarking data due to the different methods employed, as demonstrated in Table 18.

Table 18 Research methods used by UK-based absence researchers

Source	Research Methods	Response rate
CIPD (2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11,456 questionnaires sent out to people management specialists and HR practitioners 	9.8%
CIPD (2007a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14813 questionnaires sent out to people management specialists and HR practitioners 	5.5%
EEF (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey sent to all 6000 EEF members 	10%
Harvey and Nicholson (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaire sent out to a population of 2575 	50.5%
James, Cunningham and Dibben (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Postal surveys to 1000 organisations 30 follow up interviews 	30% for surveys

Several strategies have been identified which have been proven in certain instances to improve return rates. Within this study the following “non-economic incentives” (Lund and Gram, 1998:154) have been employed with the specific aim of trying to maximise the response rate as far as possible:

- All FLMS received an email to inform them in advance that they would be receiving a questionnaire to complete (Robson, 2002). This email also demonstrated the research had the support and approval of the organisation and highlighted some benefits in participation.
- The layout and structure of the questionnaire incorporated the best practice findings of Dillman (2000).
- The title and length of the title shown on the survey was concise and informative (Lund and Gram, 1998:157).
- A pre-paid envelope was sent out with the questionnaires to encourage responses (Edwards et al., 2002).
- After the original copy of the survey was sent out, three reminder emails were sent out at later dates as this practice had the potential to increase the response rate by between 20-40% (Dillman, 2000:177). As the surveys are anonymous it was necessary to contact all of the potential respondents, which means a limitation was people who have already completed and returned their response were contacted again when it was not relevant. Conversely, this reinforced the anonymity of the surveys.

A number of existing studies have confirmed that the use of monetary incentives can have a positive impact on response rates. For example, in the work carried out by Edwards et al. (2002) their response rate doubled when offering an incentive for participation. Unfortunately the ethics policy of the researcher’s Business School does not permit this practice and therefore this opportunity to gain more responses was not used.

In line with good academic practice (Baruch, 1999) the response rates are provided and commented upon within Chapter Six (as reproduced below in Table 19). Due to GMBC not being able to identify the exact number of FLMS, two figures are provided based on estimates of the population size from the organisation.

Table 19 Overall survey response rate

Response rate: Assuming a population of 200 FLMs	44.5%
Response rate: Assuming a population of 225 FLMs	39.5%

The importance of the covering letter is often underestimated as it is often the sole chance to try and engage with potential respondents, so it is important it carries the right messages to encourage responses. It is also believed placing an emphasis on the fact that it is part of a Doctoral research project may enhance the questionnaire's standing and may encourage participation. The use of University headed paper may have further enhanced the credibility of the research alongside GMBC's logo to demonstrate the support from the organisation.

The covering letter stressed the importance of improved absence management, from the perspectives of both the organisation and the individual FLMs, as well as a brief overview of potential benefits of the research for their role in managing absence. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity were addressed in the letter and the message is reinforced by the fact that no labels or codes were used anywhere on the documents, so identities of respondents could not be traced. Finally in terms of the covering letter, the arrangements for contacting the researcher in order to answer any questions were highlighted, alongside the arrangements for how to return the questionnaires and the deadline date.

4.7.1.2. Construction of the survey questions

It was important when constructing the questions that they were all relevant to the research question, and they would enable the aims and objectives of the study to be met (Robson, 2002) as well as testing the stated hypotheses. Alreck and Settle (1995:55) reinforce the importance of effective design of the questions when they state:

The reliability and validity of survey results depend on the way that every aspect of the survey is planned and executed, but the questions addressed to the respondents are the most essential component.

In spite of the fact that it is common for many surveys to begin by collecting biographical data, it is considered this is not effective practice and may actually put off some potential respondents from completing the questionnaire (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982). These questions therefore appeared at the end, so the survey began with questions related specifically to absence in GMBC. Baker (2003) builds upon this and suggests the structure and sequence of the questions may have an impact on the way in which the respondent answers the questions.

Construction of the questions and statements for the questionnaire is of fundamental importance. For the purposes of this research the advice of both Alreck and Settle (1995) and Bryman and Bell (2006) was used to develop appropriate questions for inclusion. Firstly this meant the questions have the characteristics of focus, brevity and simplicity. Bryman and Bell (2006:50) also advise care must be taken to ensure the given response categories do not overlap, and double-barrelled and leading or presuming questions should be avoided. In addition where possible, the questions were designed so the respondents would only be answering questions on topics or information they could be expected to have knowledge about (Robson, 2002). For example; FLMs are only asked about the absence levels of their direct subordinates, as they are unlikely to be aware of absence rates for other teams in their department.

The analysis of the results specifically highlights the questions with high non response rates and explores the potential reasons why this might be the case. In addition questions which might have been misinterpreted are also highlighted, for example; when responses which are mathematically impossible are provided as a response to a question. An overview of these findings is provided in Table 20.

Table 20 Questions with the highest non-response rates

Question number	Question	Missing responses %	Potential reason for missing responses
A3	Please state which sub-department you work in e.g. Supported Housing	29.2%	As some of the Departments are small respondents may have worried about their anonymity.
B3	Over the last year what is the average number of days absence for your team?	23.6%	Past research suggests many FLMs are not aware of this figure and therefore are unable to provide it.
E1.4	Please give four words that you think describes your management style when you are managing the absence of your staff	19.1%	Question E1.4 asks for the fourth word and as there are far fewer missing responses for the first three words it is reasonable to assume they may not have been able to think of a fourth word.

Researchers have to make a decision about the extent to which their survey may contain elements of the work of others. There are advantages of using existing scales, particularly when they have been subjected to extensive validity testing and provide clear instructions for how the scales should be scored. The main potential weakness to this approach is that the scale was created for a different purpose and it may have been tailored for a specific context. In addition, the original aims of the scale are unlikely to be closely aligned to the present study. Within this Doctoral study the researcher decided to make use of three well established scales to measure the concepts of job satisfaction (using the work of Spector, 1994); organisation commitment (using the work of Mowday et al. 1979); and manager behaviour (using the work of Ohio State University, 1957). All of these tools are well established and have been replicated successfully in different contexts.

Some of the wording in the statements was amended to allow consistency with the terminology used in the organisation. In addition, as part of the piloting process, GMBC requested that the statements in the scales refer to 'the Council' rather than the original wording of 'the organisation'. The responses to the statements were analysed in accordance with the marking criteria featured within the relevant research studies, this was particularly important to ensure that the relevant statements were reverse scored where appropriate.

Baker (2003:197) insists the memory of the respondents must be considered at the design stage and states that researchers should not assume that participants will be able to recall everything accurately. In line with Baker's (2003) recommendation to use a specified time period, the FLMS were asked to consider absence over a one year period. This was considered to be a realistic time-frame, and the actual data was easily accessible from the HR Department if the FLMS wanted to refer to it.

The collection of some personal data about the respondents is considered to be an important part of the process, as it links directly with some of the key hypotheses, it is therefore important to consider exactly what information is required and how it should be requested. In line with the positivist philosophy, data was only requested on the variables related to the hypotheses for this study.

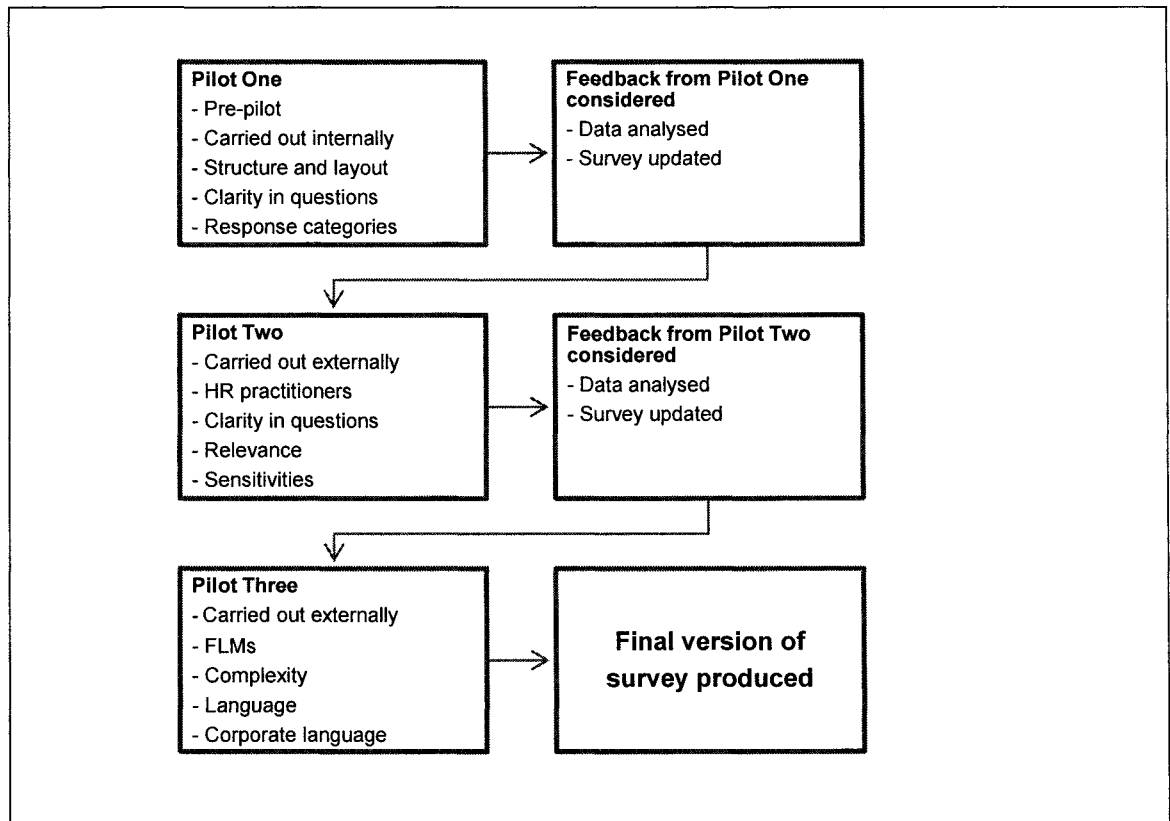
In terms of personal characteristics, it was appropriate to ask the respondents for the following details; age; gender; length of service; job grade; personal absence record; and whether they had previously worked in a non-management role at GMBC (this variable is referred to as career history within the conceptual model). Additional variables such as ethnic origin and religion were not relevant to this study. Robson (2002:246) recommends the use of groupings for variables such as age and salary, rather than asking for precise figures. This should encourage more of the respondents to provide this information. For this study the variable of job grade was used rather than salary levels as it was believed that respondents were more likely to know this information and would be less anxious about disclosing this information.

4.7.1.3. Pilot study

Oppenheim (1992) stresses the importance of carrying out pilot studies, and reinforces that all aspects of the study need to be piloted. This means that it is not sufficient merely to look at the content of the wording, and that other areas such as the layout, sequencing of the questions and contents of covering letters or participant sheets should be included. Oppenheim (1992:48) raises the important point that it is not the poorly worded questions that need to be rooted out, but *“far more dangerous are apparently unproblematic items which, unwittingly, produce spurious negatives or positives”*.

In order to try and avoid these problems not being identified at the pilot stage, it was important to provide careful instructions and guidance to the pilot study participants to ensure feedback was provided in the relevant areas. Even where some of the scales have been adapted from existing research or studies it is important to test them within their new context (Oppenheim, 1992). The piloting process used for this study is shown in Figure 32.

Figure 32 Overview of piloting process



A range of comments was received from the pilot participants including queries over the response categories that were offered for specific questions and how the respondents should indicate their chosen response. Surprisingly, few comments were received on the terminology that had been used and overall the comments from the participants were positive. A summary of the feedback received from the pilot study participants is shown below in Figure 33.

Figure 33 Summary of feedback received from survey pilots

- Remove the 'other' category from question 3.1.
- Include a 'not sure' category on question 2.4.
- Be clear about whether respondents can tick more than one response category for the table in question 3.1.
- The instructions should be changed so that respondents are asked to tick the box of their chosen response rather than circling the words. This also meant adding in tick boxes for all of the relevant questions.
- Removing the response category of X on the Likert scale questions.
- Amend the wording of some of the questions so that they were clearer.
- Incorporate Gateshead terminology.
- Correct typographical errors.

Using the completed surveys from the pilot stages the data were entered into SPSS so that the data analysis process could also be tested. This ensured that the data (and the format in which it appeared on the survey) were appropriate and allowed the relevant calculations and statistical tests to be practised. This led to the re-design of some of the response categories to remove the 'other' categories, thus forcing the respondents to choose the most appropriate response.

4.7.1.4. Sample

A comparative study was chosen which focused on two divisions within GMBC. After analysing the organisation's historic absence statistics, the highest (with the lowest absence levels) and lowest (with the highest absence levels) performing divisions were selected. This means that a non-random sampling method was employed and contextual information on the two divisions was provided within Chapter Two to define the specific characteristics which may partially explain their absence levels (and their subsequent inclusion as the hotspot divisions in this study).

4.7.1.5. Challenges encountered with using questionnaires

One of the principal challenges was identifying the target respondents and establishing lines of communication with them as the organisation did not have a system in place to be able to contact their FLMs directly. Lindsay (2005) suggests that this complex process of relying on a set of 'gatekeepers' to gain access to a certain group is an under-appreciated challenge of conducting primary research. In this instance this was further complicated by a reliance on a number of different gatekeepers at different levels in the organisation to forward the questionnaires so that they would eventually reach their target audience. The use of gate-keepers and the surrounding issues is discussed in more detail within section 4.8 of this chapter.

A further limitation is that there is a possibility that the respondents may not have knowledge of some of the objective data that is requested on the questionnaire. For example, they are asked to give details about the specific absence figures for their team. However, if a large number of respondents fail to answer this question this will be a finding in itself as it may indicate problems in communicating important information. This is confirmed in the work of the Cabinet Office (2004) who state that it is essential that managers have access to accurate and up-to-date absence statistics.

A further challenge was encountered in identifying a suitable tool to measure management styles and behaviour. Several existing surveys were evaluated but were not considered to be appropriate for this particular research study. The chosen tool following the evaluation was the 'Leadership Behaviour Description Questionnaire' (Ohio State University, 1957) as it covered appropriate concepts such as '*maintain definite standards of performance*' and in addition the wording used in the statements was considered to be appropriate to the FLM audience. Although this study tool was originally published by Ohio State University in 1957, the scales continue to be used in a range of contemporary studies. Recent examples include modified versions of this tool used by Selmer (1997); Yukl et al. (2002) and Chang and Lin (2008).

4.7.1.6. Use of electronic questionnaires

The use of electronic questionnaires as the sole method of collecting the survey data was not pursued due to the perception that not all of the target respondents had access to a computer terminal. However, as the traditional method of sending out hard copies of questionnaires was not attracting sufficient responses, it was supplemented through the distribution of an electronic version. Dillman and Christian (2005:4) state that this method of mode-changing is becoming quite common practice in organisational research and refer to this as "intra mode differences". When creating the online version of the survey, the researcher ensured that identical questions and response categories were used.

Ensuring consistency in design and wording between paper based and electronic surveys is important as the work of Dillman and Christian (2005) demonstrates that small differences in wording can have an impact on how respondents interpret and answer the survey. A programme was chosen (www.smart-survey.co.uk) that had both logic design capabilities and validation capabilities as recommended by Crawford (2002). These features enabled the survey to filter the questions depending on the answer to the previous question and enhanced the professionalism of the survey instrument.

The time implications involved in setting up and testing the online survey were offset by the time saved in not having to input the data from the completed surveys. The electronic version was distributed via a hyperlink which was inserted into an email message to an electronic mailing list held by the relevant group Secretariats.

This approach was chosen to show the legitimacy of the survey and to distinguish it from a commercial survey as suggested by Fricker and Schonlau (2002). A limitation of the anonymity granted to respondents was that the reminder emails had to be distributed to the whole mailing list as employees who had already completed it could not be identified.

Although research by authors such as Fricker and Schonlau (2002) suggests that this method does not usually gain a higher response rate than alternatives such as mail surveys, in this case it facilitated access to a wider range of potential participants. However Coomber (1997) believes that the response rate in his study may have been higher because it was electronic as the questions were of a sensitive nature and the perception of anonymity was higher on the online version. Although research by Paolo et al. (2000) found that a higher number of respondents failed to answer questions in online versions rather than mail surveys, this does not appear to have been a problem within this study.

4.7.1.7. Measurement issues

The questionnaire consists of seven different sections (labelled A – G on both versions of the survey) in order to be able to test the proposed model and ultimately facilitate the answering of the research question. A variety of question types were used to investigate behaviour, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and attributes. It was important to consider what type of question would be the most appropriate for the different sections, as this also impacted upon the question design and the way that it would be measured.

Oppenheim (1992:150) also discusses the importance of not relying on single questions to try and measure complicated topics which are not tangible. The nature of Doctoral research and the requirement for an original contribution to knowledge means that in most studies, there are likely to be at least some parts which require the construction of a new scale. This may also be the case if existing scales are available, but are not considered appropriate for the context of research into absence management. One of the key limitations of devising a new scale is that it limits the opportunities for useful comparisons or benchmarking.

Less complicated variables such as personal characteristics are easier to use from past surveys as there are usually a finite number of possible responses. The organisation's categories were used for variables such as names of departments and pay grades so that they were accurate and easy for the respondents to choose the correct response in a format that they were familiar with.

Although a number of measurement scales exist have been used successfully in other contexts, a Likert-scale approach was used for the majority of the questions. Within the scales there are an equal number of positive and negative statements to choose from, with the addition of 'neither agree nor disagree'. The Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) designed by Ohio State University (1957) was utilised to measure the behaviour and management style of managers (utilising the instructions provided by Halpin, 1957).

Although Schrauf and Navarro (2005:373) highlight the concern that tests may not be appropriate for different populations, in this instance the LBDQ has been successfully used on a number of different populations (Selmer, 1997; Yukl et al., 2002; and Chang and Lin, 2008). Due to time and space considerations fourteen items were selected from the scale rather than using it in its entirety. This practice of not using the entire questionnaire has been used in the past in the work of authors such as Sims et al. (1976) and Sgro et al. (1980).

Organisation commitment was a key variable incorporated in the conceptual model for this study and was measured using the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) which was developed by Mowday et al. (1979). Eight out of the 15 original questionnaire items were used within section D1 of the questionnaire in order to gauge the levels of organisational commitment of the FLM respondents. A combination of positively and negatively directed questions were used to try and ensure that the respondents read the questions carefully. This selective approach to using the initial OCQ is similar to the approach used by Beck and Wilson (2000).

Job satisfaction is one of the most frequently tested variables when investigating sickness absence (Hackett, 1989) and was measured within this survey by using nine items from Spector's (1994) Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) which was originally published in 1985. This survey has since been replicated by a number of authors (Silva, 2006 and Watson et al., 2007) as well as other authors who used

aspects of the survey rather than replicating the JSS in its full format (e.g. Barrows and Wesson, 2001). Spector (1985 and 1999) provides instructions within his work for calculating scores when not all of the 36 statements have been used and this was incorporated into this research design. These statements appeared in section D1 of the questionnaire.

Although this section has provided evidence that the three pre-existing scales that were used for this study have subsequently been utilised in different forms by other researchers, it has to be acknowledged that the choice of which statements should be used is essentially a subjective process. In line with the approach taken by Ryan et al. (2008) the statements were selected using the researcher's knowledge of the underlying constructs that are tackled by the scales. This means that there was a reasonable level of confidence in the face validity; however this remains a subjective process. On a more objective level, the internal reliabilities were calculated for the sets of statements and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure the internal consistency of the groups of statements. As each of the sets of statements generated an alpha score of 0.70 or above this was evidence of a good support for internal consistency reliability (Morgan et al., 2004).

One of the main reasons why shortened versions of the scales were utilised was the lack of space on the questionnaire, as the work of Herzog and Bachman (1981) established an association whereby longer questionnaires can result in lower response rates. Siu and Cooper (1998) faced a similar problem when compiling their questionnaire on stress and reduced the number of scale items in order to minimise the length of the questionnaire. In addition Ryan et al (2008) chose to shorten their questionnaires which had previously been used on a number of occasions in their entirety over concerns that the mean time of completing the questionnaire (51 minutes) was having a negative impact on response rates and was leading to feelings of survey overload within the workplace.

Whilst the researcher has tried to mitigate the subjectivity of selecting a number of statements from existing scales (rather than using them in their complete form) by ensuring a balance of positively and negatively worded statements were used; this issue remains a potential limitation of this study. In future research by the author, this expert review process could be expanded to include a more objective process as advocated by Ryan et al. (2008).

4.7.1.8. Data analysis

The quantitative analysis of the survey data was carried out using SPSS. The analysis begins by looking at the descriptive statistics and conducting a univariate analysis on all of the questions using frequency tables (provided as Appendix Six). Bar charts are also used to illustrate the responses to some of the key questions. Using these techniques allowed the identification of any outliers in the data, as this was identified as a problem in past research into absenteeism. The types of statistical tests that can be carried out on the survey responses depend upon the type of data that is produced by the questionnaires.

Carrying out tests to measure associations or differences (as appropriate) by looking at correlations was an essential part of this data analysis in order to be able to test the hypotheses and sub-hypotheses. The correlations looked to test the variables outlined in the conceptual model (and the hypotheses) to test whether there was an association or difference between the responses and the reported levels of employee absence. The actual tests used were dependent on the individual survey questions and the type and format of the response data (i.e. nominal or ordinal data). For example; Question C7.1 was '*How would you rate your knowledge of the following HR policies?*' and respondents could choose from three responses of: *very knowledgeable, knowledgeable, not very knowledgeable*. In this instance Spearman was the most appropriate test. Where quantitative data was provided as a response (for example, Question A4 was '*Please state how many years you have worked in your current role?*') it was appropriate to use Pearson to test for an association with the levels of absence of employees. Finally, for dichotomous questions (for example, those requiring a response of yes or no) the Mann-Whitney test was used.

Table 21 presents a summary of how each question on the survey was analysed using an appropriate statistical technique. The questions are cross-referenced against the appropriate hypothesis taken from the conceptual model for this study.

Table 21 Overview of statistical tests used to analyse survey data

Question No	Question(s)	Format of response category	Hypotheses Ref	Data analysis techniques
A1	Which area do you work in?	Two choices	2.1	Frequency table Mann-Whitney with levels of absence (B3)
A2	Which Department are you based in?	Choice of 11 Departments and one 'other' category	2.2	Frequency table Kruskal Wallis with attitude statements
A3	Please state which sub-department you are based in.	Open question	2.2	Frequency table Kruskal Wallis with attitude statements
A4	Please state how many years you have worked in your current role.	Open for them to add relevant number	1.3	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
A5.1	Have you previously worked in a non-management role at Gateshead Council?	Two choices – yes/no	1.6	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)
A5.2	If yes, did you work in the same Department that you do now?	Two choices – yes/no	1.6	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)
A6	Please state how many days absence you have had in the last year.	Open for them to add relevant number	1.5	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
A7	How many times have you been absent in the last year?	Open for them to add relevant number	1.5	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
B1	How many staff are you responsible for?	Open for them to add relevant number	2.3	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)

Table 21 Overview of statistical tests used to analyse survey data (continued)

B2	Approx how many of these staff are part time?	Open for them to add relevant number	2.4	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
B3	Over the last year, what is the average number of days absence for your team?	Open for them to add relevant number	ALL HYPOTHESES 1.1-5.3	Frequency table
C1	Please indicate who has responsibility for the following areas of absence management – followed by a list of 15 statements	Six response categories (You, your line manager, HR Department, Senior Managers, Trade Unions, Occ Health). Respondents can choose more than one response category and received a score.	4.1	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
C2.1	Do you carry out return-to-work interviews after every absence in your team?	Yes/No	5.3	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)
C2.2	If no, please give the main reason	Open question		Frequency table
C3.1	Do you carry out sickness counselling interviews whenever an employee hits a trigger point?	Yes/No	5.3	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)
C3.2	If no, please give the main reason.	Open question		Frequency table
C4.1	Do you regularly monitor the absence levels of your team?	Yes/No	5.3	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)

Table 21 Overview of statistical tests used to analyse survey data (continued)

Question No	Question(s)	Format of response category	Hypotheses Ref	Data analysis techniques
C4.2	If no, please give the main reason	Open question		Frequency table
C5.1	Are there any things which prevent you from carrying out your duties in relation to managing absence?	Yes/No	5.3	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)
C5.2	If yes, please give details	Open question		Frequency table
C6	How would you rate the support you receive from the following parties in managing absence cases? (followed by three different groups – Your immediate manager, senior management and HR Department)	Three choices (good, satisfactory, poor)	3.5	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)
C7.1	How would you rate your knowledge of the following HR policies (list of five policies)	Three response categories (very knowledgeable, knowledgeable and not very knowledgeable)	4.3	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)
C7.2	How would you rate your confidence in applying the following HR policies (list of five policies)	Three response categories (very confident, confident and not very confident)	5.2	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)
D1	Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements (followed by nineteen statements)	Five items on a Likert scale (Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)	3.1 3.2	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)

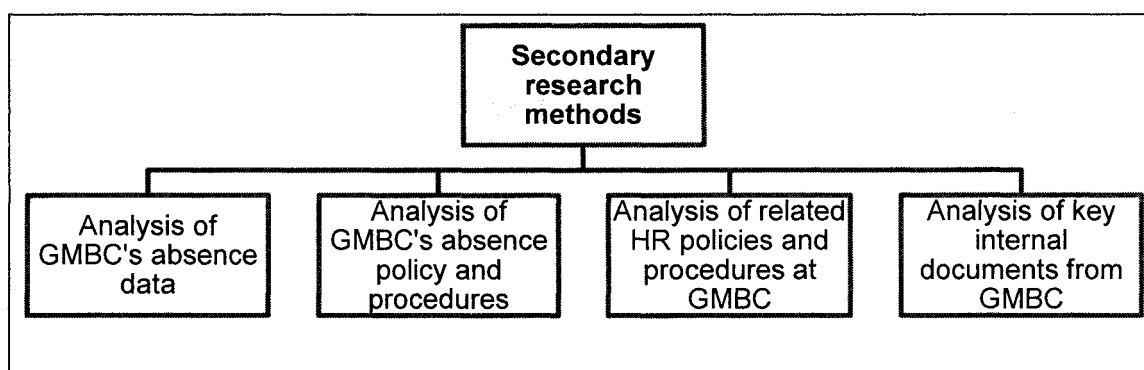
Table 21 Overview of statistical tests used to analyse survey data (continued)

Question No	Question(s)	Format of response category	Hypotheses Ref	Data analysis techniques
E1	Please give four words that you think describe your management style when you are managing the absence of your staff.	Open question – asked to provide four words	3.4	Frequency table
E2	Thinking about your general management style, please indicate how often you think you engage in the following behaviours (followed by fourteen statements)	Five items on a Likert scale (Always, often, occasionally, seldom, never)	3.4	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)
F1	Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements (followed by fifteen statements)	Five items on a Likert scale (Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)	3.3 4.2 5.1	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)
G1	What is your gender?	Two choices	1.1	Frequency table Mann-Whitney with levels of absence (B3)
G2	What is your age?	Open for them to add relevant number	1.2	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
G3	What is your total length of service?	Open for them to add relevant number	1.3	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
G4	Please indicate your current job grade	Six response categories including 'other'	1.4	Frequency table Kruskal Wallis to see if there are differences between the different pay grades

4.7.2. Analysing secondary data

A range of secondary data was analysed as part of this study to provide some rich contextual information on the organisation and to provide an objective analysis of how absence is managed at GMBC. Whilst the principle focus of this study is on the characteristics of FLMS required to manage absence 'effectively', it is important that they are supported by the organisation through the provision of appropriate policies and procedures (Cabinet Office, 2004 and Hayday, 2007). This includes the need for organisations to have an effective absence management policy in line with good practice (CIPD, 2007b and 2007c). In addition, absence management should be managed holistically through other people management policies practices in the organisation (Bennett, 2002) and visible management commitment (McHugh, 2002). The range of secondary methods used is shown in Figure 34 and each method is discussed in more detail within this section.

Figure 34 Overview of secondary research methods used in this study



The key advantage of using secondary research methods was saving the time and money in not having to replicate entire studies or data collection procedures that had already been undertaken (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Within the context of this research it was not possible to collect primary data on areas such as levels and reasons for absence because of the three year time-span and the nature of the data needed. It is however acknowledged that when using secondary data it is not possible to verify whether all of the information was originally collected and interpreted in a valid and accurate way, but this is recognised as a general limitation of secondary data (Dale et al., 1988).

In order to generate an introduction to GMBC it was necessary to analyse some of the key information which is presented as part of the overview of the organisation in Chapter Two. This research was obtained and analysed objectively, utilising statistics and other documents on GMBC from internal and external sources. Figure 35 shows the range of information on GMBC that is presented within the introduction in Chapter Two.

Figure 35 Overview of information analysed on GMBC

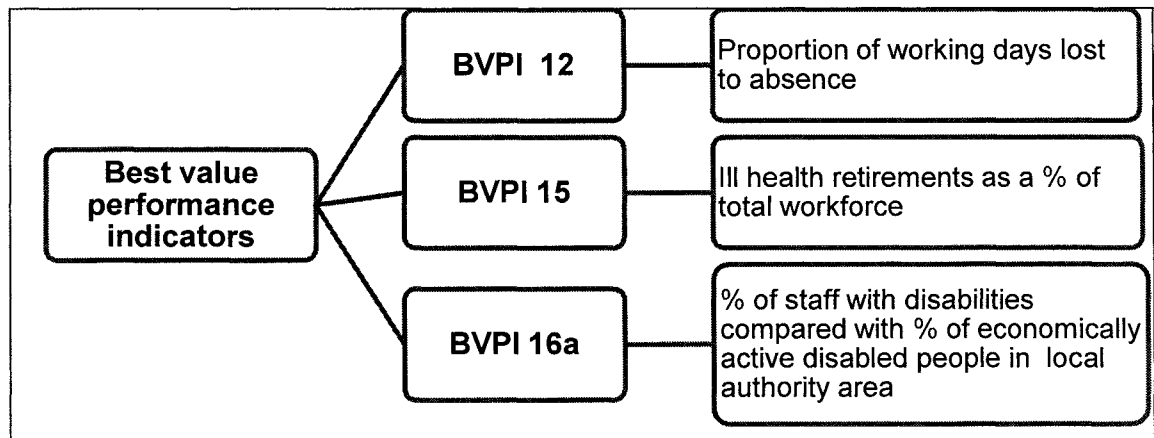
- Overview of Gateshead as a borough (location, type of authority using statistics such as the index of multiple deprivation)
- Organisation structure
- Characteristics of employees working for GMBC
 - Ratios of full time and part time workers
 - Gender breakdown
 - Age breakdown
 - Length of service
 - Range of pay grades
- Best value performance indicators (BVPI)

Data was collected from internal sources including GMBC's HR database and a series of internal documents which present reviews of past performance and targets for the future. Examples include a document entitled *Your Gateshead* (GMBC, 2007d). Information from external sources such as the Audit Commission (2006) has also been included to provide an independent perspective on the organisation within a framework which is applied to all Local Authorities.

The relevant BVPI from the Corporate Health section (DCLG, 2008) of the annual return are shown in Figure 36 and were analysed for the three year period from 1st April 2004 – 31st March 2007. Future targets for each indicator are also highlighted as part of the context and to understand the progress that is needed by GMBC. These figures are likely to have high levels of validity and reliability as the Government has strict guidelines for how the data should be collected and measured. In order to contextualise the most important BVPI for this study (BVPI 12, proportion of working days lost to absence) figures have been provided for six neighbouring local authorities over the three year period.

This allows a comparison with other Local Authorities that are likely to be operating in a similar economic climate.

Figure 36 Best value performance indicators used in the study



After looking at data at an organisational level, a focus was placed on the two hotspot divisions that are investigated within this research. A comparison of data was carried out by analysing the characteristics of employees to show whether the profiles of the divisions are similar. This involved the examination of the gender and age profiles of the two divisional workforces. These characteristics are important as Chapter Three highlighted the relationships that have been shown to exist with the levels of absence reported by organisations.

4.7.2.1. Organisational absence data

Within a quantitative study the analysis of the organisation's absence data is a crucial element; this is consistent with the majority of studies on absenteeism (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998). This data is examined with Chapter Two of this study to facilitate the understanding of the context of GMBC. Previous researchers have confirmed that it can be a very complex and time-consuming process to be able to collect the appropriate data in a useful format, as was found in the absenteeism research by McHugh (2001). Within this Doctoral study, the researcher had to rely on the data that could be produced by the organisation's new computerised HR system. Absence data for the organisation was obtained for the following three year time period: 1st April – 31st March 2007.

This information was initially looked at on an organisation-wide basis to identify the levels of absence and the reasons provided for absences. Following on from this, levels of absence were calculated on the basis of the job grade and length of service of the employees. The absence data was then broken down to a Divisional level so that comparisons could be made within the organisation. The reasons for absence in each of the divisions was analysed using the categories utilised by the organisation as shown in Figure 37.

Figure 37 Categories of medical reasons for absence

- Back problems
- Chest, respiratory
- Eye/ear/nose/mouth
- Genito-urinary
- Headaches/migraines
- Post operation recovery and hospitalisation
- Other musculo-skeletal
- Other
- Pregnancy related
- Stomach/liver/digestion
- Stress/depression/mental health
- Viral infection
- Heart/blood pressure
- Industrial musculo-skeletal
- Industrial chest / respiratory
- Sickness

Finally, the absence data in each division was then drilled down to departmental level and analysed over a two year period (2005-2007) as the organisation was unable to provide this data for the year 2004-2005. Comparisons of absence levels were made to contemporary research studies such as CIPD (2008b) and Cabinet Office (2004) to identify whether the trends at GMBC were similar.

4.7.2.2. Analysis of organisational policies

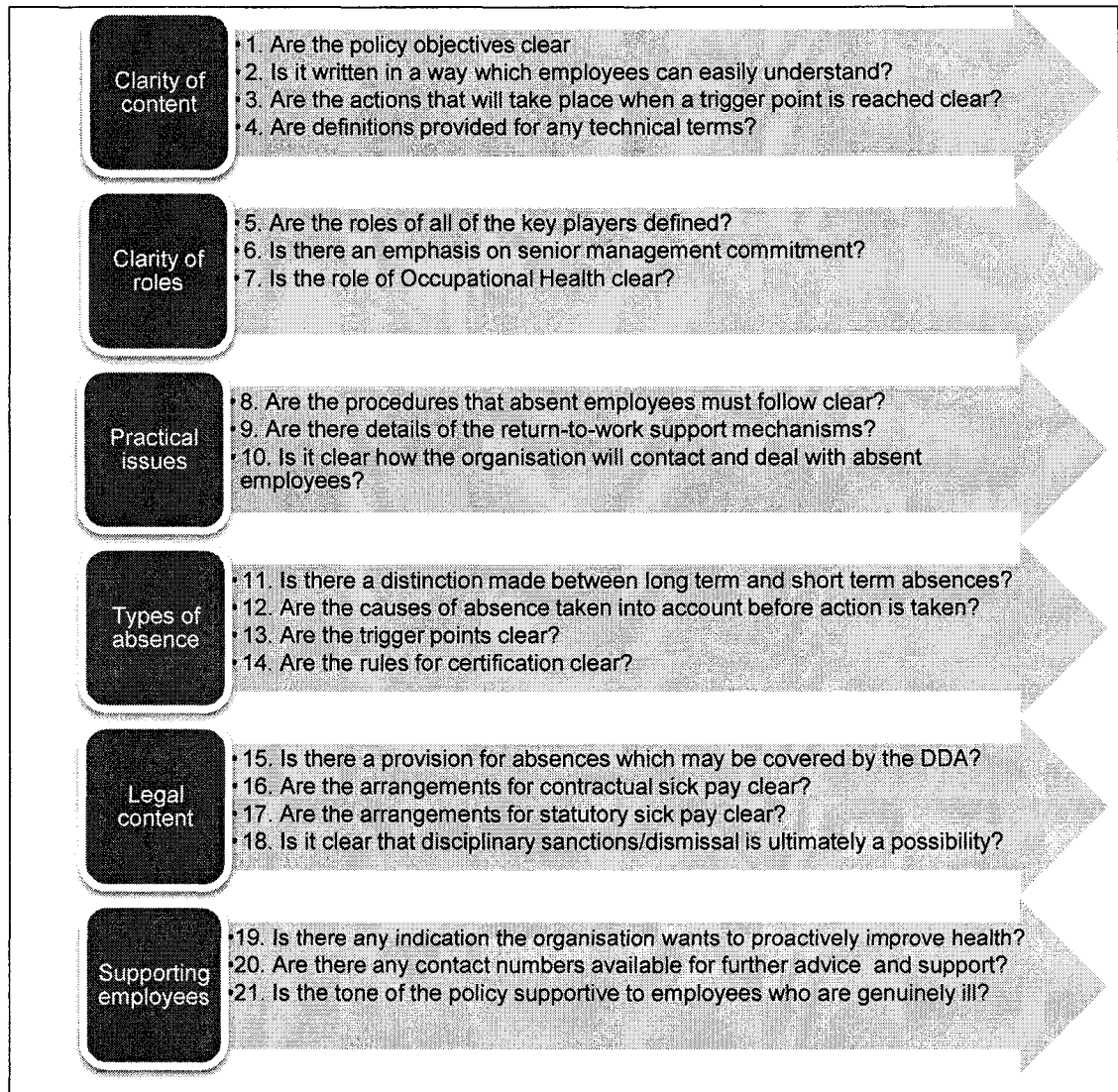
Research suggests that a successful absence management strategy should be holistic and be embedded throughout all of the appropriate HR policies and practices (Cabinet Office, 1998). It was therefore appropriate to content-analyse both the organisation's absence management and related HR policies. This provided a challenge within a predominantly positivist study in order to maintain objectivity, and was achieved through the use of an objective set of criteria designed through the review of the literature. The results are important to the objectives of this study as FLMs need to be supported by appropriate organisational policies in order to be able to manage absence effectively.

4.7.2.2.1. Absence management policies and procedures

The literature is clear about the importance of having an effective absence management policy and accompanying procedures (Cabinet Office 2004; Hayday et al., 2007 and McHugh 2002) and how this may result in lower absence levels (CIPD, 2007b). It was therefore appropriate to review the policies as part of this research to analyse the extent to which they are judged to meet best practice guidance. The specific absence policy (and closely related policies and procedures) were evaluated against a set of criteria developed from existing literature and best practice publications.

The criteria designed for this study builds upon the work of Australian Public Service Commission (2006); Bevan (2003); National Audit Office (2004b); Hayday (2008); Cunningham et al, (2004); Dibben et al, (2001a); James et al, (2002); Cabinet Office, (1998); Cunningham and James, (2000); Hayday et al (2007); Hayday, (2006); Bevan and Hayday (2003); Acas, (2006); CIPD, (2007b) and DPP, (2008). As this tool was developed specifically for this study and is based on an extensive search of the literature, its potential for replication provides a further contribution to knowledge made by this study. Six key themes were identified from the literature, they were: clarity of content; clarity of roles; practical issues; types of absence; legal content and supporting employees. These six criteria were then broken down to a series of more specific questions from which the absence policies could be analysed. A full list of the criteria is provided in Figure 38.

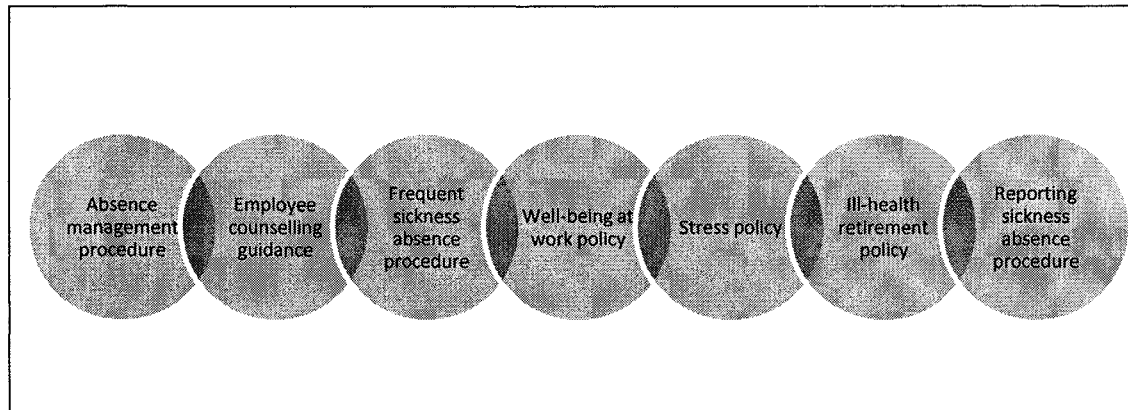
Figure 38 Criteria to evaluate absence management policies and procedures



The organisation was found to have seven policy documents related to absence management (as shown in Figure 39), therefore they were all scored. A limitation of the use of a large number of policy documents is that it is likely evidence of meeting the criteria may be spread across all seven of them. It was therefore recognised within the data analysis that a full score of 21 was unlikely to be met (though not impossible) within any individual document. In addition it has to be recognised that there will be an element of subjectivity when applying these criteria to the different policies as some of the criteria are difficult to objectively judge. For example whilst it is easy to test criterion four by seeing whether the definitions appear in the document, it is more difficult to objectively test criterion one which requires the researcher to assess whether the policy objectives are clear.

Using this form of data analysis was intended to provide the results against the criteria rather than to explore the type of language used which might have been utilised if a more qualitative approach had been taken to this study (Rapley, 2007).

Figure 39 GMBC's absence management policies and procedures reviewed in the study



The information elicited from the absence policies and procedures was also used in conjunction with one of the questions on the FLMs' survey where they were asked to align all of the tasks contained within the policy to the stakeholders that had responsibility for carrying them out. A clear understanding of the policy allowed the researcher to give a more accurate representation of whether or not the survey respondents were clear about the roles and responsibilities involved. In addition to gaining an understanding of how absence should be managed in the organisation if the policies are being closely followed this system could provide a useful benchmark that could be used by other organisations (in both public and private sectors).

Within Chapter Five the results of the policy analysis are provided in two separate ways. Firstly, each policy is provided with a score out of 21 to show how many of the criteria they were able to meet. This is followed by looking more closely at the 21 criteria to see which of them were most frequently met, initially for each of the six key themes and then looking at each of the 21 criteria in turn. This allowed each criterion to gain a maximum score of seven if there was evidence in each of the seven documents that were analysed. The results provide an overall view of GMBC's absence policies and are supplemented by recommendations for future practice.

4.7.2.2.2. General HR policies

General HR policies play an important role in organisations, and are a vital tool for FLMs as Purcell and Hutchinson (2007:4) states:

FLMs need well designed HR practices to use in their people management activities in order to help motivate and reward employees and deal with performance issues and worker needs.

CIPD (2007d) is clear about the importance of HR policies to enable organisations to develop fair and consistent approaches in managing their employees. They also reinforce the importance of policies taking into account the culture of the organisation and alignment with wider corporate strategies. Quite surprisingly there are no commonly used checklists for analysing HR policies, though there is often some best practice guidance issued for individual policies from organisations such as CIPD. In addition, despite the growing literature on the role of FLMs, little work has been carried out to test whether or not their increasing responsibilities are recognised within the content and structure of HR policies.

Research by Cabinet Office (2004) is also very clear that effective absence management need to be part of a holistic HR strategy and therefore links should be explicit within surrounding HR policies. This is important because effective absence management needs to be supported in areas such as recruitment and selection. For example, previous absence histories should be explored as part of the recruitment and selection process and may impact on the decision-making process.

These two central arguments necessitated the design of a set of criteria to evaluate the associated HR policies objectively and in particular whether they made explicit references to absence management (or their sickness absence policy) and whether there was clarity in the role played by FLMs. To explore this issue ten of the organisation's HR policies were analysed (as identified in Figure 40) to observe whether absence management appears to be part of a holistic HR process.

Figure 40 Organisational HR policies reviewed within the study

- Recruitment and Selection
- Health and Safety
- Discipline and Grievance
- Equal Opportunities
- Flexible working
- Work-life balance
- Home-working
- Job sharing
- Training and Development
- Performance Management

To structure the analysis, five criteria were defined which could be used to score each of the HR policies. In addition to identifying evidence of links with the absence policy and the role of FLMs, three other criteria were produced which are in line with general good practice in HR policy development. The five criteria are outlined in Figure 41.

Figure 41 Criteria used to evaluate GMBC's HR policies

1. Is there a clear link to the absence policy?
2. Is there clarity in the responsibilities of different stakeholders?
3. Is the role of FLMs clear?
4. Is the notion of senior management commitment implicit in the policy?
5. Is the policy written in an accessible format?

The analysis of the HR policies is presented in a similar way to the analysis of the absence management policies. All ten policies were analysed and scored out of five. This is followed by identifying which of the five criteria were most frequently met in the policies. An overall evaluation is provided which evaluates the extent to which absence appears to be managed as part of a holistic HR process.

4.7.2.3. Analysis of general organisational documents

This section of the study includes the analysis of a number of organisational documents which were segmented into three categories (Employee focused, Corporate and Councillor led) as shown in Table 22.

Table 22 Overview of internal documents analysed

Employee focused	Corporate	Councillor-led
Results of Employee Survey: Guide for employees	Corporate Improvement Plan (2005-06)	Report to Cabinet (15/02/05)
	Learning and Development Framework (2006)	Corporate Vitality Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Minutes of meetings in 2005: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15/02/05, 22/04/05, 20/06/05 • 18/07/05, 05/09/05, 07/11/05 • 05/12/05
	Corporate Vitality 2006/07 Annual Report	Corporate Vitality Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Minutes of meetings in 2006: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 06/01/06, 06/02/06, 06/03/06 • 03/04/06, 12/06/06, 11/09/06 • 16/10/06, 27/11/06
	Corporate Plan 2007-2010	Corporate Vitality Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Minutes of meetings in 2007: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15/01/07, 26/02/07, 22/03/07 • 16/04/07

Results from the last two employee satisfaction surveys were reviewed which was classed as ‘survey-based secondary data’ (Saunders et al., 2003). As this survey is completed every two years, the findings of the two most recent versions were available for analysis. Using this information facilitated some comparisons with the primary research findings from this study and provides some additional contextual information on the organisation and the way in which it operates.

A range of corporate documents were analysed to assess the extent to which managing sickness absence was included. A variety of documents were retrieved which focused on reviews of performance and documents which set out future plans and targets. A simple form of analysis was used by reviewing each document for evidence of discussion of the issue of managing sickness absence and whether any specific action points were identified. A summary is provided which assesses the extent to which sickness absence features in these key corporate documents and the nature of the information that is included.

When assessing the Councillor-led documents, minutes from a variety of meetings were obtained as they were considered to be an appropriate source of information. These documents provided information about the way absence management has been reviewed by the relevant Committees and the subsequent actions taken.

The initial analysis took the form of a basic count of the number of occasions where managing absence appeared in Committee agendas, the minutes from the meetings were then explored to assess the extent to which absence had been discussed and the resulting action points. A wealth of information was obtained on the practices employed by the organisation to date, alongside some of their future strategies to try to reduce levels of sickness absence.

4.8. Negotiating access to GMBC

Negotiating access to an organisation is a crucial part of a research study and includes *“presentation of both the research and researcher to stakeholders, gatekeepers and the participants themselves”* (Lindsay, 2005:121). In some instances this can mean the researcher providing numerous presentations to different committees to gain permission. In this instance as the area of investigation was aligned with the strategic objectives of the organisation, the process of access was more straightforward. Organisational consent was obtained from the Strategic Director of Human Resources who also agreed to promote the research to other senior managers. It is considered that one of the reasons why the researcher was granted permission was because she had experience of managing sickness absence in a similar context and therefore may have been viewed as *“street smart”* (Harris et al, 2008:240) or have more credibility (Lindsay, 2005). Authorisation was given for the researcher to contact all employees and the survey and accompanying documentation were allowed to feature the Council’s logo to confirm the project had been endorsed at senior management level. In addition, the two Trade Unions whose members were potentially going to be research participants were contacted and provided with an overview of their research to ensure that they had no objections. Lindsay (2005) suggests that Trade Union support can also increase the credibility of the research and encourage their members to participate in the study.

The key challenge was in physically getting the copies of the questionnaires through all of the organisation’s gatekeepers, which Harris et al (2008) confirm can be the case when trying to work with *“hard to reach”* research populations. A gatekeeper is defined by Crano and Brewer (2001:237) as *“an individual who can affect the likelihood of a respondent’s co-operating with the [researcher]”*.

This was a significant issue as the organisation was unable to easily identify the target group of FLMs within the two divisions; the consequence being that it was not possible to personally address the questionnaires to the intended audience. Initially the researcher took a 'starting from the top' approach and senior managers were asked to cascade the information down to the target group of FLMs. To aid this process and to try to ensure that the correct people were contacted, a definition of FLMs was provided. This was considered to be important as this job role can be interpreted in different ways. For the purpose of this, the definition from Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) was used in an adapted form to try and overcome any ambiguities over who the questionnaires should be passed to. Hutchinson and Purcell's (2003:4) full definition of FLMs is:

Managers who are responsible for work group(s) to a higher level of management and who are placed in the lower levels of the management hierarchy, normally at the first level. They tended to have employees reporting to them who themselves did not have any management or supervisory responsibility and were responsible for the day-to-day running of their work area rather than strategic matters.

For the purpose of this study the definition of FLMs was shortened to: "*FLMs are those managers at the first level who have employees reporting to them who themselves do not have any management or supervisory responsibilities*". However, when it became evident this approach was not resulting in a high number of completed questionnaires being returned, a new approach was taken. This is consistent with the work of Mauthner et al (2002:61) who comment:

The need to rethink routes and modes of access both at the outset and once a study is underway is clearly necessary in research that explores groups who may be difficult to access for a range of reasons.

This involved using the approach defined by Lindsay (2005) as 'starting from the middle' whereby middle managers are contacted and provided with some information about why the proposed study is important and useful and asked to pass on information. This approach is advocated by Harris et al (2008:240) who state "*there is a need to recognise that the perceived relative merit of research topic may itself act as an enabler*".

Again this approach relied on a set of organisational stakeholders to take responsibility for distributing the questionnaires to the appropriate people. However, a risk remains that this group might fail to pass on the questionnaires or they might not select participants from the appropriate target group (Heath et al, 2004) and it would be difficult for the researcher to be able to control for this (Grogan et al., 2000). Further potential limitations surround potential distributor bias whereby the gatekeepers contribute some of their own opinions which may impact on the way that the FLMS respond to some of the questions (Pires et al, 2003) or as in the case of van Teijlingen et al (2001) the gatekeeper may independently choose to change the method of distribution of the surveys. This approach led to a number of additional completed surveys being returned, possibly as there were fewer gatekeepers to get through and fewer potential opportunities for the surveys to have been mislaid or a decision being taken not to forward them to the target participants.

Investigations within the organisation suggested that there was still an issue regarding many of the target respondents having not received a copy of the survey which led to the researcher trying to target the Departments directly through the use of a named contact and using external post. This approach led to a second tranche of replies being received however the overall response rate was still less than 20% and insufficient for this research. Finally the researcher developed an electronic version of the survey which was sent out using internal mailing lists (though still relying upon an element of the message being forwarded by managers). This proved to be a worthwhile adjustment to the research method and increased the response rate by over 20%. Whilst the difficulties in the distribution of the questionnaire are a potential limitation of this study, this section has aimed to highlight the steps taken by the researcher to try and overcome these organisation-based challenges.

4.9. Ethical considerations

Paying attention to ethical issues is even more important when the research is of a sensitive nature (Lee,1993) and this applies to studies on sickness absence. Attention to ethics has been a continuous process throughout all stages of this thesis. At the start of the research ethical approval was formally sought from the School's' ethics committee and was subsequently granted. The Acting Strategic Director of HR within Gateshead Council provided

organisational consent on behalf of the organisation. The informed consent form was designed to be particularly detailed (a copy is provided as Appendix One) to explain that the data may be used for future conference papers, publications and to inform research-led teaching. In this instance, further ethical permission was not required from any professional bodies, though as a courtesy, both Trade Unions were consulted over the final version of the questionnaire.

Informed consent was obtained from all respondents to the surveys and was evident via the completion and return of the questionnaires. All of the survey responses were anonymous and the researcher guaranteed none of the respondents would be identifiable either directly or indirectly within the final thesis. To ensure the respondents were clear about their anonymity etc they were provided with a list of FAQ (frequently asked questions) which addressed some of the common queries research participants may have. In addition, no coding information or reference codes were used on the surveys to reassure the respondents.

When using electronic surveys there were additional ethical factors to consider. A number of options are available by means of distributing the questionnaires and the researcher chose the one which was perceived as being the most secure. This involved sending the website address to the potential respondents and asking them to visit the site and complete the survey. The alternative options such as an email-based survey would not have allowed this. To reinforce the anonymity provided to respondents, they were not required to use any type of username or password to access and complete the survey, though as Jacobson (1999) points out most systems do have the capability to trace I.P addresses should the researcher so desire. The researcher ensured this tracking facility was not activated within the online software.

The information gathered and analysis of the data has been treated in accordance with the organisation's Records Management Policy and wider data protection legislation.

4.10. Reliability

Reliability is concerned with measuring the consistency of the research tool to verify the robustness of it (Saunders et al., 2006). Within this study this was most important for the surveys completed by FLMS. The nature of the study was such that it wasn't appropriate to use the 'test-re-test' method as it would have been very difficult to administer the questionnaire twice, particularly when it was a challenge to recruit respondents. Using the internal consistency method was more appropriate as it allowed correlating responses within the same survey, the results of which are reported in the data analysis chapters by calculating the Cronbach alpha for all of the scales used in the survey. Reliability was also considered at the beginning of the design stage where the use of alternative forms of questions were included so the responses could be compared. In line with advice from Saunders et al. (2006) this technique was used sparingly.

4.11. Limitations of this study

In line with the majority of research projects there are recognised limitations to this study. These limitations can be divided into two categories: firstly there are issues which are inherent within absence-focused studies and secondly there are those specific to this study. The issues which appear to be inherent within research on absenteeism are discussed in more detail within Chapter Three which explores the extant research base.

This work has tried to overcome some of the problems raised in existing studies by not relying on a univariate analysis of the survey results as discussed by Watson et al. (1985:577). Robinson et al. (1969) describe a huge dilemma which confronts researchers into absence due to the desirability of being able to relate absence records to work attitudes but at the same time needing to guarantee the anonymity of the respondents. This was confirmed in the later work of Nicholson et al. (1977:500) who state the requirement of anonymity *"precludes a direct match with individual absence records from company records"*. Therefore, this reinforces that this limitation is not confined to the researcher's own research project. In addition authors in the field such as Deery et al. (1995) recognise that collecting self-reported data is acceptable within studies on sickness absence.

A key area of concern in this study was initially the response rate of the surveys, despite the efforts employed to try and maximise participation. However, according to Harrison and Martocchio (1998) this is also consistent with previous studies in this area (although there are few that are directly comparable) and there were sufficient responses to be able to carry out the desired statistical tests.

The low response rate is likely to be linked to the fact that the surveys needed to be completed by a 'difficult to reach' group of respondents (Lindsay, 2005) whose names did not exist on one single database. This led to an over-reliance on messages being filtered down through different layers of management within the organisation. Anecdotal evidence from employees in the organisation suggested many of the surveys did not reach their final intended audience. This implies the low response rate may not be as a consequence of people making a deliberate decision to not participate in the study, they simply may not have received the option to take part. There is also a concern about not having a definitive answer to how big the population of FLMs in the two divisions is which means the response rate may not be accurate. Unfortunately this is outside of the control of the researcher who had had to rely on data provided by the organisation. As the Business School to which the researcher is affiliated does not permit any form of incentive to be offered to respondents, this possible method of attracting more respondents could not be executed. This would have been very useful within this study as Lindsay (2005) found incentives were particularly useful in gaining responses from the more difficult to reach groups.

When using questionnaires, there are several potential limitations that can occur in the design stage. In terms of the design and content of the questionnaire, this was driven by the literature from which the hypotheses were drawn. Where possible, the researcher used existing scales to measure core concepts such as job satisfaction, organisation commitment and management style; however section 4.4 in this chapter outlined the possible disadvantages of using these scales in a shortened format. In order to design a robust research instrument, concepts were measured using a series of questions or statements rather than relying on a single measure, however to some extent this is still a subjective process with the researcher designing the research instruments.

The decision to design and conduct a three-stage pilot process demonstrates a clear strategy to try and maximise the robustness of the questionnaire and its content. This was achieved by having specific aims for each of the pilot stages, reflecting on the feedback and then making appropriate changes. The pilot process encompassed a wide range of areas from considering the structure and layout of the questionnaire; language used within the questions; clarity of questions; whether the response categories were appropriate; the relevance of the questions to the research question; identification of any potentially sensitive issues; use of corporate language; and ensuring that FLMs were able to respond to all of the questions by asking FLMs from another Department to complete the questionnaire at the final stage of the pilot. In addition to ensuring that the content, layout and structure of the pilot was appropriate, it was also possible to use the completed pilot questionnaires to perform the relevant statistical tests to confirm their appropriateness.

Compromises were required over the length of the questionnaire and the depth of concepts that could realistically be covered within it. As research by Lund and Gram (1998) and Herzog and Bachman (1981) established a correlation between response rates and the length of the questionnaire, care had to be taken to avoid the document becoming too lengthy. However, a possible limitation of this approach is that the process of deciding which of the research instruments to use and the length of scales is essentially a subjective process, even when careful cross-referencing was carried out to ensure that the questionnaire would still cover all of the relevant areas and ultimately facilitate a response to the overall research question: *What are the characteristics of first line managers (FLMs) required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?*

There are potential limitations of using a single organisation when carrying out research (Anderson, 2008), particularly in relation to the whether the study is representative to the wider population and issues surrounding the potential generalisability of the research. Clearly one of the key issues in using a single organisation is the potential threat to generalisability of the findings of the research; however actions were taken within this research to ensure that generalisations are as strong as possible by using a range of measures and scales within the surveys advocated by Hartley (2005).

Chapter Two of this thesis also provided evidence of how GMBC appeared to be representative of other public sector organisations as SESR (2007) suggested that organisations with the sector have defining characteristics. This was evidenced in the findings of Balloch et al. (1995) and Employers Organisation (2005) who confirmed that absence levels are consistently higher in departments with direct care services. In addition, the profile of the workforce at GMBC was also shown to be representative of the findings of Horder (1999), Heap (2005) and Millard and Machin (2007) in respect of the high percentage of female and part-time workers and the high average for length of service. This suggests that some of the findings may be generalisable across other public sector organisations and particularly Local Authorities (Robson, 2007d).

To further support this perspective; within Eisenhardt (1991) it is argued that if research carried out in single organisations has identified and explored a clear research focus, it can be valuable. This appears to be substantiated by Hartley (2005:331) who agrees that a valuable contribution can still be made and suggests that generalisation can be based on theoretical propositions rather than simply generalising in terms of populations. The final chapter of this Doctoral thesis is clear about a strand of future research being to test the research instruments further by replicating them in additional organisations, and this future work will therefore address some of these generalisation issues and will be reported in future publications.

Yin (1981) also believes that an unfair myth surrounding work conducted within a single case organisation is that they have to be predominantly qualitative, when in fact there are many examples of quantitative-focused research projects on case study organisations. It remains important that rigorous research methods have been used (Eisenhardt, 1991) and this is achieved within the current study by detailing how the questionnaires were piloted and how the criteria for absence policies were constructed. It is also worth considering one of the widely recognised benefits of single organisation studies as Yin (1994) suggests that they can add rich value to research because of the level of detail they seek to address, often using a variety of research methods.

A further potential limitation is that this study has focused specifically on FLMS, meaning that they were the only source of primary research, rather than carrying out research with multiple stakeholders within GMBC. However, this is not the only absence related study which has used this angle of focusing specifically on the FLMS. For example, this approach was used in the work of Renwick (2003) who interviewed 40 FLMS and did not engage with different groups of stakeholders. Whilst gaining the views of multiple stakeholders would undoubtedly have been a useful exercise, it was felt that this approach would not have been consistent with the research approach adopted and would not have addressed the specific research question for this study which centres around identifying the characteristics of FLMS required to 'effectively' manage absence. Within the final chapter of this thesis, the researcher acknowledges the potential advantages of researching the perspectives of other stakeholders and identifies this as a strong area for future research.

To supplement the acknowledged limitations of research studies, Collis and Hussey (2003:129) suggest it is also good practice to highlight the delimitations of the study, this is defined as: "*how the scope of your study is focused on one particular area*". In relation to this study the boundaries were carefully scoped to try and ensure the focus was on making a contribution to knowledge in the area of investigating the characteristics of FLMS in effectively managing absence. This has meant some potentially interesting areas could not be discussed in depth. A series of refined areas for future work are provided within Chapter Seven.

4.12. Summary of chapter

This chapter has addressed the following research objective:

- To design and implement an appropriate methodology and quantitative methods to establish the characteristics of FLMS to 'effectively' manage absence.

This objective has been achieved by demonstrating the rationale employed in the research design to ensure consistency with the chosen research philosophy. The research methods have been evaluated to demonstrate their appropriateness to answering the research question as well as the techniques that have been used to design the content. The approach taken to policy analysis potentially provides an interesting development in the field whereby the criteria could be replicated in future studies on absence management policies.

The next chapter provides the research findings and analysis from the secondary data analysis carried out for this study.

Chapter Five

Research Findings:

Analysis of secondary data sources

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of organisational secondary data in order to address the guiding research question: *What are the characteristics required of FLMs to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?* The following research objectives are addressed within this chapter:

- To design and implement an appropriate methodology and quantitative methods to establish the characteristics of FLMs to 'effectively' manage absence
- To analyse the data and synthesise with the literature review in order to progress the current theory base and enable an original contribution to knowledge using a positivist study
- To investigate how absence should be managed holistically through analysis of the organisation's absence management policies to support the role played by FLMs

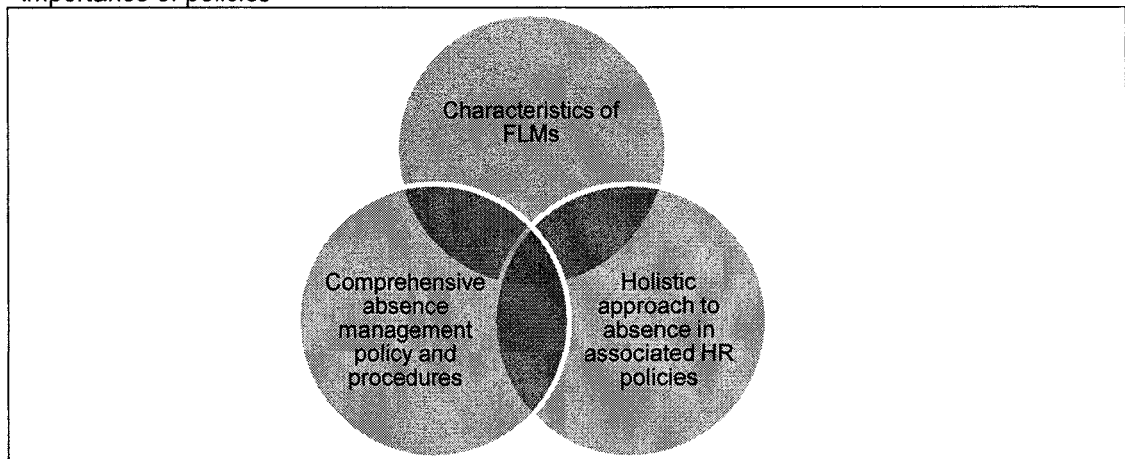
This secondary data analysis was an important part of the research for this study as it enables the presentation of a fuller picture of how absence is managed now and has been managed in the past by the case study organisation. Chapter Three of this thesis provided an evaluation and synthesis of the current theory base in relation to absence management. Within this review it was clearly established that FLMs play a significant role in managing absence (Cabinet Office, 2004 and Cunningham et al., 2006), however there were also other important supporting variables including the need for a comprehensive absence management policy. Deery et al (1995) confirmed the importance of absence management policies in organisations which was consistent with earlier work by Dalton and Todor (1993) within an overall absence strategy. The arrangements surrounding the implementation and use of absence management policies is an important issue for FLMs (Hayday, 2008), and when used appropriately absence management policies can support both the organisation and themselves to manage absence effectively (CIPD, 2007b). The link between the two concepts can also be justified through the

research of McHugh (2002) who was clear about the use of absence management policies to enable consistent actions to be taken by the FLMs.

Through the provision of this clear rationale, it was appropriate to try and objectively evaluate the organisation's absence management policies and procedures to ensure that they were in line with best practice guidance, to support the role of FLMs in being able to access and apply them when dealing with absence management cases. This approach would seem to support the belief of Bennett (2002) that good policies are a format of organisational support for the FLMs. The importance of this aspect is also reinforced by the fact that addressing this specific area was one of the primary objectives of this Doctoral thesis. The review of absence management policies also provides a potential contribution to knowledge as Johns (2003:170) states that previous documentary analysis has usually revolved around "*examining the content of arbitration case reports*". Whilst Bevan et al. (2004) did review absence management policies as part of their research into how employers manage absence, the policies were not objectively analysed using formal criteria. After reviewing the policies of the case study organisations Bevan et al. (2004) concluded that most of the policies addressed the three following broad issues; setting parameters for employees and managers; management of absence cases; and making arrangements for absence cover. It is therefore considered that the current Doctoral study provides a greater insight into the actual content of the policies when tested against best practice criteria.

The review of the existing theory base also highlighted the importance of managing sickness absence being part of a holistic approach taken by the organisation. This is consistent with the work of Baptiste (2008) who believe that impact on performance is improved when policies are used in conjunction with each other rather than as distinct policies. As a consequence of the wider devolution of HR practices to FLMs, it is likely that in many organisations that these FLMs will require knowledge of the wider HR policies and therefore within this study it was appropriate to analyse these policies to see if they made explicit links to the absence policy, and whether or not they provided a clear overview of the role of the FLMs in enacting the policy requirements. The relationship between these three areas is depicted in Figure 42.

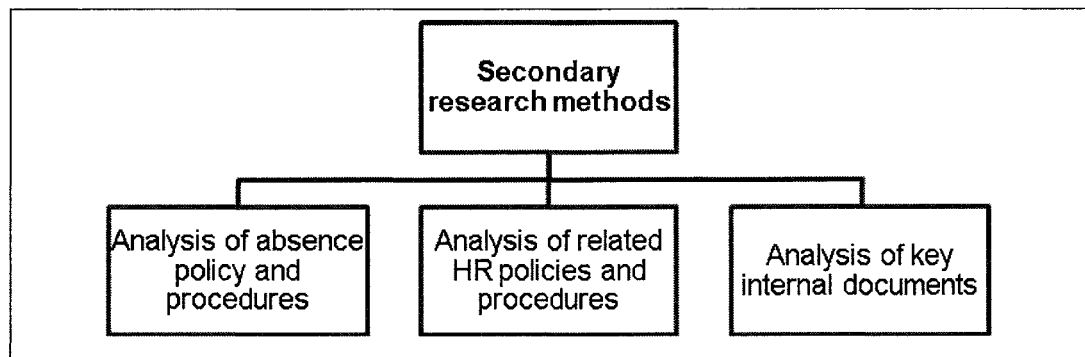
Figure 42 Framework demonstrating the links between characteristics of FLMs and the importance of policies



This secondary research also includes an evaluation of a series of organisational documents to establish whether evidence exists that that senior management commitment to absence is embedded across a series of the key internal documents. This is an interesting aspect of this research which builds upon the past research of Bennett (2002) who suggested that there was often a gap between rhetoric and reality. Conducting this element of the research will also establish whether there are any similarities with the findings of a number of Audit Commission reports (e.g. Audit Commission, 2001) which found that in practice, the importance of absence management was not explicit within public sector organisations' strategic priorities or performance plans.

In line with the positivist stance taken in this study, the data has been analysed objectively using a set of appropriate criteria generated from the extant research in this field. An overview of the methods used is provided in Figure 43.

Figure 43 Overview of non-survey research methods employed in the study



The data from each of these secondary methods has been analysed appropriately to generate discussions which can be synthesised with the extant research which was evaluated in Chapter Three. The quantitative results of the survey to FLMs are presented and discussed within the subsequent data analysis chapter (Chapter Six).

Carrying out secondary research in these three areas is an important part of this thesis as it allows a wider evaluation in the context in which the FLMs work. In addition, the range of research methods employed potentially makes a valuable contribution to the knowledge base, as there is no evidence to suggest that this holistic type of research has previously been carried out. The construction of research instruments to test these areas will also enhance the potential future replication of research that is carried out in associated areas of absence management.

5.2. Analysis of organisational policies

Two sets of organisational policies were analysed as part of this research to gain an understanding of the organisation's practices as well as analysing them against a set of best practice focused criteria. The subsequent section analyses specific absence management policies and procedures followed by ten wider HR policies.

5.2.1. Analysis of organisational absence policies

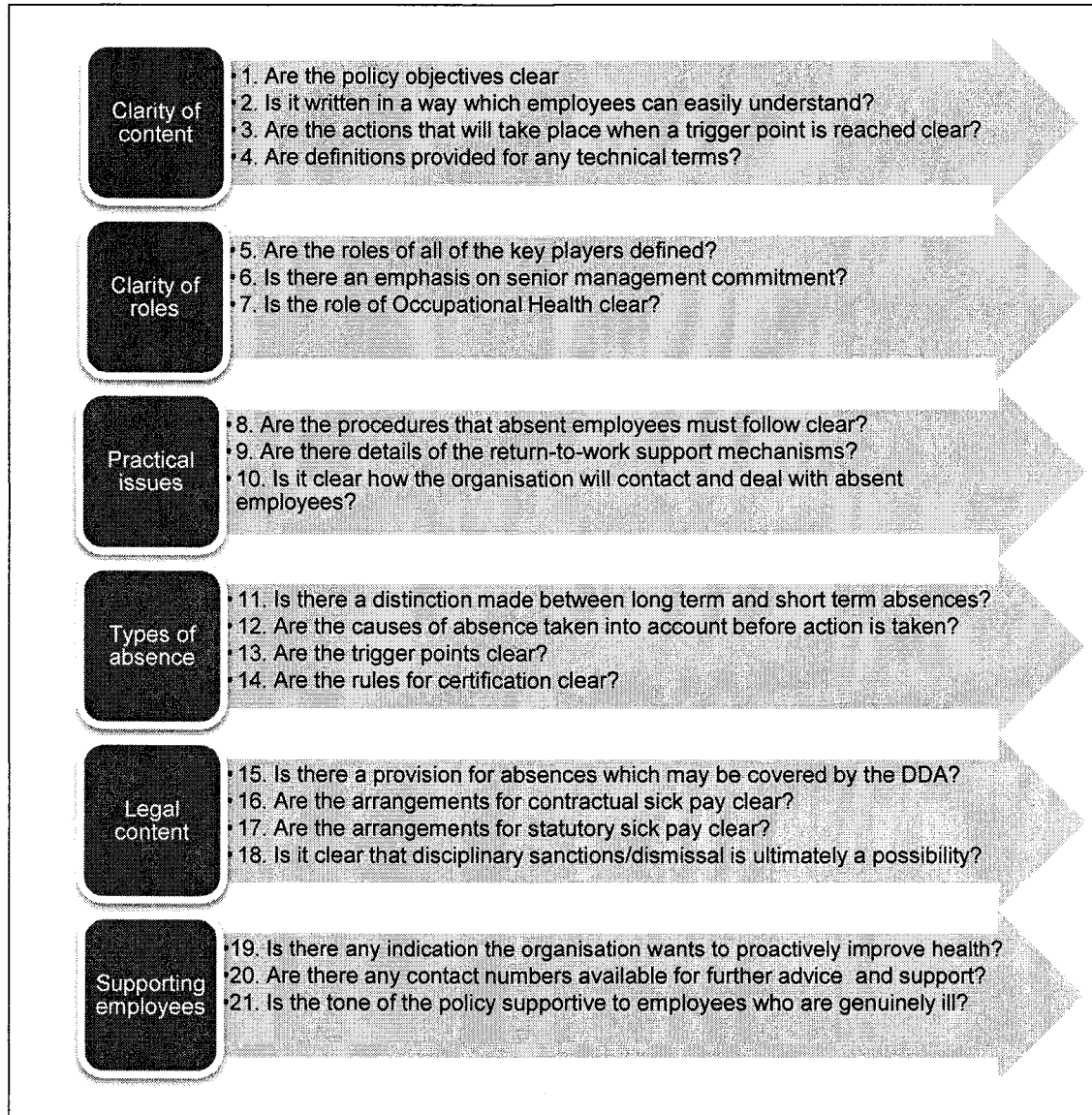
The existence of an absence management policy is crucial for organisations (Bennett, 2002) and this is reflected in the CIPD (2008b) statistic that over 90% of organisations have a policy (rising to 99% in public sector organisations). Research in the field of absence management is explicit about the need for organisations to have an effective absence management policy (Deery et al., 1995); however there are no widely accepted guidelines which sufficiently define the content or scope of an 'effective' policy. This perceived gap in the existing knowledge base necessitated the creation of a new set of criteria which were developed by the author specifically for the purpose of this study.

Appleton and Cowley (1997) adopted a similar approach when analysing documents on 'clinical guidelines' where they constructed their own research tool due to the lack of any existing measurement tools. A further similarity occurs in the objectivity of how the documents were analysed which Appleton and Cowley (1997:1012) describe as "*each document has been critiqued as if it were a research instrument*". This suggests that the researchers were not looking at the documents from the perspective of one specific type of stakeholder. In addition the authors generated a 'checklist of 38 criteria that could be used to assess each policy document, which is in line with the approach adopted for this study.

Based on the analysis of these sources of best practice which were outlined in Chapter Three, the work of a number of authors was used; Australian Public Service Commission (2006); Bevan (2003); National Audit Office (2004b); Hayday (2008); Cunningham et al., (2004); Dibben et al., (2001a); James et al., (2002); Cabinet Office, (1998); Cunningham and James, (2000); Hayday et al. (2007); Hayday, (2006); Bevan and Hayday (2003); Acas, (2006); CIPD, (2007b) and DPP, (2008). The use of a number of organisational/practitioner focused resources in generating these criteria is consistent with the methods employed in existing research studies; for example Dibben et al. (2001a) refers to a number of Government papers (for example, Cabinet Office, 1998) when discussing best practice in absence management.

From this review, 21 specific criteria were generated (displayed in Figure 44). These criteria allowed an objective analysis of the organisation's absence management policy based on the six themes of good practice in absence policies which are: clarity of content of the absence policy; clarity of the roles that need to be carried out by different stakeholders; practical issues in the management of absence; distinguishing between types of absences; inclusion of relevant legal content and details of the support offered to absent employees. All of these areas need to be included to ensure that FLMs have clarity in how they should be managing the absence of their employees. From an operational perspective, if the policy is not clear it will be difficult for FLMs to manage

Figure 44 Criteria for analysing absence policies and procedures

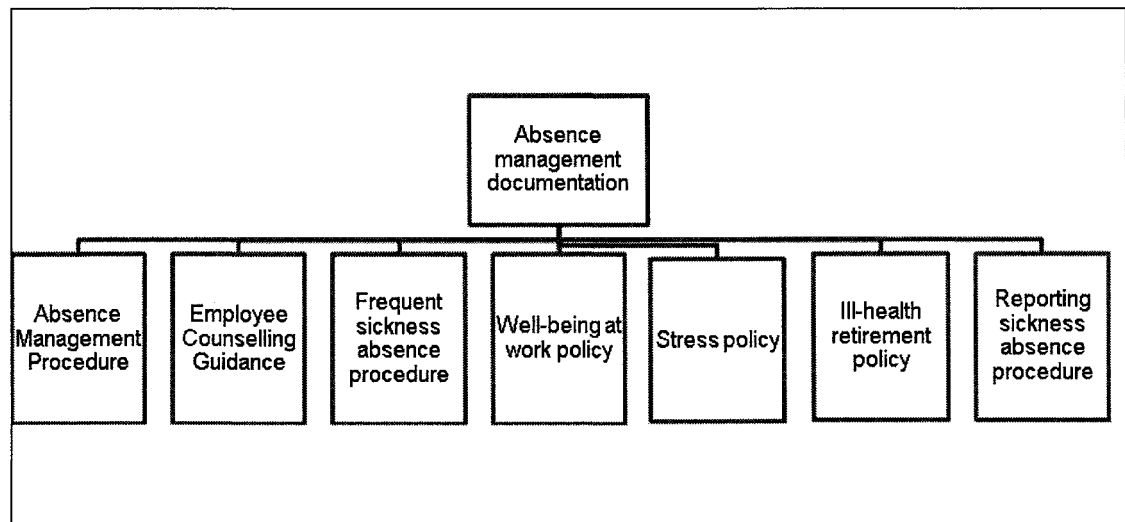


As this tool (shown in Figure 44) was developed from a sound underpinning of academic and practitioner literature it is possible it could be replicated across other organisations (particularly those in the public sector) as a medium for reviewing their existing provision or designing a new one. From an academic perspective, the criteria could be replicated in future studies on the effectiveness of absence management policies and contribute to this currently under-researched area. However, it remains important to acknowledge that the identification and testing of these criteria remains a potentially subjective area and therefore if future research involved the comparison of results between organisations, this would need to be taken into account. Further testing and development of these criteria could be carried out at a later date in order to enhance their validity and reliability.

5.2.1.1. Analysis at the policy level

Gateshead Metropolitan Borough (GMBC) has seven different policies relating to absence management (as shown in Figure 45) rather than one individual policy document; this necessitated all policies being analysed separately against the criteria.

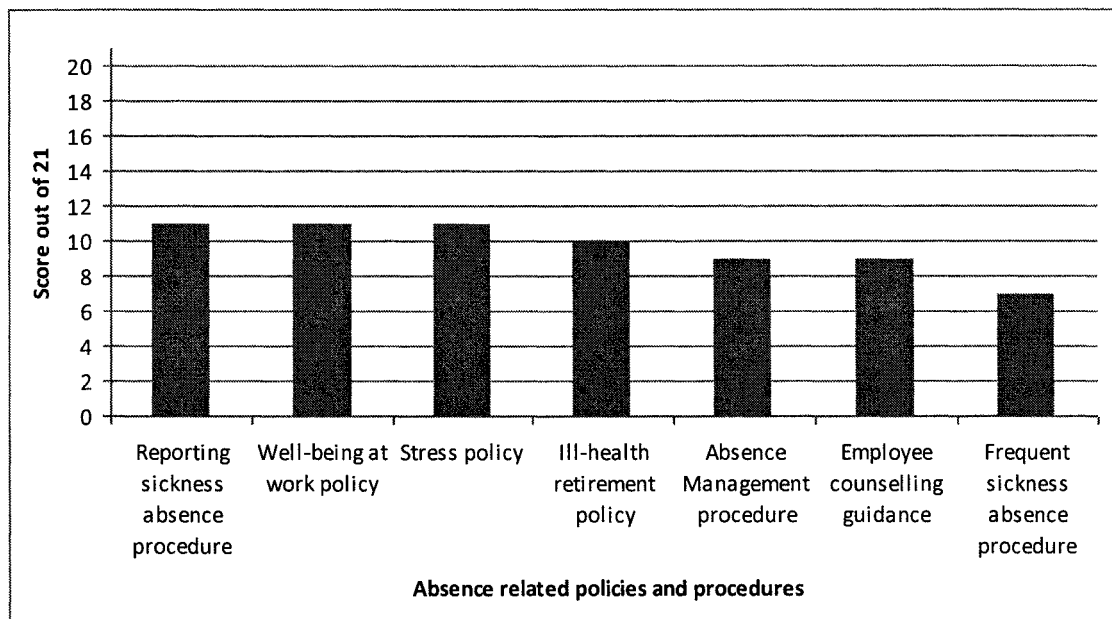
Figure 45 Absence policies and procedures used by the organisation



The existence of several related policies is an interesting finding in itself as stakeholders would need to be able to locate and interpret all seven documents to fully engage in understanding and following the absence management process. Though there is no existing research which states multiple policies are less desirable, from an access perspective, Acas (2006) recommends a comprehensive policy document which contains all of the necessary information. The large number of policies may suggest they were written at different periods of time and new policies may not have been cross-referenced against the content of other related documents.

Initially the analysis was focused at the policy level and each policy was analysed simply to show whether it did or did not meet the criteria (as defined in Figure 43). When assessing the policy documents, the author took the perspective of an independent researcher testing objective criteria, thereby supporting the overall research philosophy. Figure 46 shows how the policies scored when judged against all of the 21 criteria, where the maximum possible score was 21 which was considered to be achievable for all of the documents. A table showing more detailed information, including the scores and which criteria were met for each of the seven policies are presented within Appendix Two.

Figure 46 Analysis of policies and procedures against 21 good practice criteria



On an overall level, Figure 46 shows that none of the documents met all 21 criteria and the three joint highest scoring documents achieved scores of just over 50%. This modest score for the best ‘performing’ policies may suggest it is unrealistic for a full score of 21 to be gained. The data could be interpreted in a different way to suggest these two policies contributed to 50% of the defined criteria, which may be a more positive way of reporting the data in this situation.

The ‘reporting sickness absence procedure’ scored 11/21 which made it one of the joint highest scoring policies. ‘Well-being at work’ and ‘stress management’ are two very contemporary issues and not all organisations have designed and implemented policies in this area yet (CBI, 2008). It is therefore interesting that GMBC has separate formal policies for both and they were two of the most compliant when compared against the best practice criteria, scoring 11/21.

However, it could be argued these more proactive policies require the underpinning of effective absence management policies and procedures and therefore their practical success may not be optimised due to the low scores achieved by the ‘frequent sickness absence procedure’ and ‘absence management procedure’. In addition to these policies, the FLMs will play a crucial role in implementing them, and the specific characteristics required by FLMs to effectively manage absence is explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

It is particularly surprising that two of the documents which are expected to be the most frequently used (the absence management and frequent sickness absence procedures) were two of the least highly ranked documents. This may mean FLMs are not supported adequately due to some policy omissions such as lack of information about further sources of support and proactive health interventions. This is in opposition to the work of Baptiste (2007), but confirms the views of BITC (2007) which suggests that this proactive approach is not widespread in UK organisations at present. An alternative interpretation may be that there is a crossover in the information that is contained within the 'Reporting sickness absence procedure'.

Whilst the 'employee counselling guidance' document scored 9/21, this may be because the document has been written on a single issue which focuses on providing the relevant information on employee counselling. Where a document is used in limited circumstances, this may account for the failure to discuss issues such as contractual and statutory sick pay. Similarly the 'ill health retirement' policy contains details that are very specific to employees who may be investigating this issue due to a prolonged period of ill health.

A series of recommendations can be drawn for the organisation; this could include a revision of the absence management documents to ensure all of the information is provided within one resource. The results from the scoring of the seven individual absence documents show that if all of the information was combined into one document that all twenty one points would be covered. On a practical level this would need careful assimilation to avoid repetition and to ensure a consistent message throughout the document so that all FLMs are operating consistently as per the findings of McHugh (2001).

Any changes in the absence management policy and procedures would need to be reinforced by providing appropriate training support for FLMs (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995) in addition, they may need more support so they can pass on the updated information to their subordinates with confidence that they can respond to any queries. This could be supplemented through the provision of practical checklists for managers to ensure they are carrying out their role on a daily basis. In addition to this, longer term checklists could be provided for FLMs who have long term absentees to ensure they are maintaining contact with them and ensuring the generation of appropriate medical referrals.

5.2.1.2. Investigating the policies by key themes

The data can also be analysed by identifying the criteria that were most frequently met. Table 23 provides an overview of which themes score most highly across the seven policies (as identified in Figure 45). This provides an overview of the key areas in which GMBC appears to be performing well (in relation to addressing best practice criteria in absence management policies) in addition to identifying areas for further development which may need to be more explicit in future documents. However, the failure of any one theme to meet all of the criteria is likely to be explained because of the number of policies that exist, which cumulatively would address all six of the themes.

Table 23 Analysis of scores for groups of criteria

Theme	Criteria	Percentage Score	Rank order
Clarity of content	1-4	50%	3
Clarity of roles	5-7	76%	1
Practical issues	8-10	43%	5
Types of absences	11-14	36%	4
Legal content	15-18	25%	6
Supporting employees	19-21	52%	2

The scores relating to each theme provide an interesting insight into this topic area. Looking at the broadest level, Table 23 illustrates the highest scoring criteria were those relating to *clarity in roles of the different stakeholders*, which gained a score of 76%.

The importance of this clarity is important in general people management responsibilities (Peach Martins, 2007) as well as specific absence management tasks (Renwick, 2003) and should include all of the relevant stakeholders such as employees, FLMs, senior managers, Trade Union officials and Occupational Health professionals. This means that all stakeholders should understand what they are responsible for and the timescales involved. The stakeholder sometimes neglected in policies is the employee and the responsibilities that he/she has. For example; if an employee needs to be absent they have to be clear about who to contact, how they should be contacted (and when) as well as the information that they have to provide. Further information is also needed in terms of the organisation's certification requirements.

For the purpose of this research it is essential for FLMS to have clarity in their role as confirmed in earlier work by (Cabinet Office, 2004); this will enable them to carry out their role more easily and avoid potentially difficult issues. Clarity in this area should also contribute towards co-operation between different stakeholders which Dibben et al. (2001a) stresses the importance of.

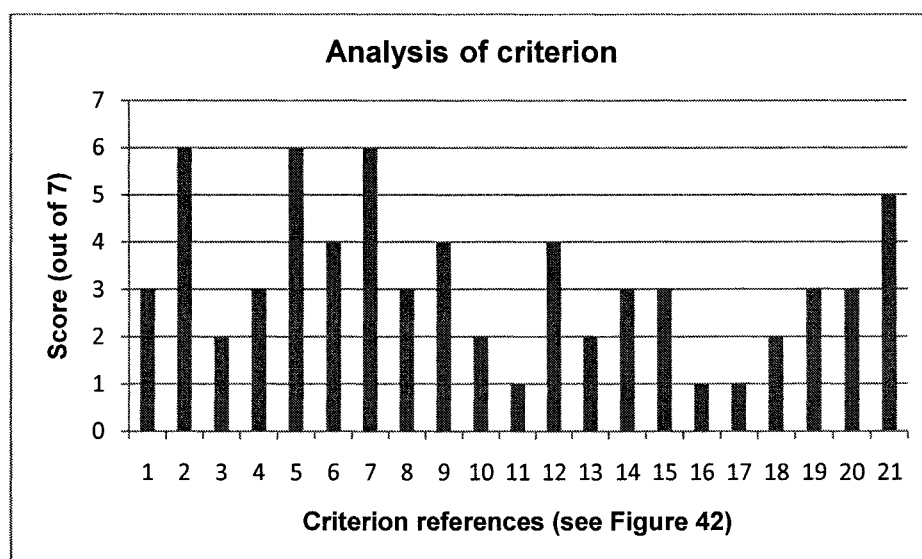
It is encouraging that the next highest scoring set of criteria was '*supporting employees*' as this is consistent with the emerging trend for organisations to focus on supporting the health and well-being of their employees (BITC, 2007). It also stands the organisation in good stead for the anticipated future changes on well-notes as recommended in the recent review by Dame Carol Black (Black, 2008). Conversely, only 25% of the policies complied with showing information related to the legal content. This may be attributable to the fact that most of the legal information is contained within one policy rather than repeating the same information.

Practical issues were ranked in fifth place (out of six) and again are likely to be highly relevant to FLMS and their ability to carry out their role as they define the procedures that must be followed, details of return-to-work mechanisms and arrangements for how the organisation should deal with absent employees. These issues are fundamental to the operational elements of managing absence and prescribe the way that the FLMS manage their employees, it is therefore essential that there should be no ambiguities or omissions in this area,

5.2.1.3. Analysis of the 21 criteria

The data can be analysed in more detail by looking at the scores for each of the 21 individual criteria (identified in Figure 45). This facilitates more explicit individual recommendations for the organisation to build upon the general areas highlighted in the previous section. This will support the role of FLMS and overcome some of the difficulties reported in previous research as uncovered in the work of Bennett (2002) and McHugh (2002).

Figure 47 Analysis of scores for each criterion



The data analysis shown in Figure 46 illustrates that three criteria were met in six out of the seven policies (criterion seven, two and five), thus achieving the highest scores. Criterion seven checked whether the role of Occupational Health was defined in the policy documents. This is an important issue for organisations as James et al. (2002) believe the role of Occupational Health is often misunderstood by employees and wrongly perceived as a punitive action. It is therefore important that organisations are clear about their remit to support employees to be able to return to work or make recommendations for suitable adjustments (Cunningham and James, 2000). James et al. (2002) also emphasise a particular need for all parties to understand the role played by the Occupational Health department as this is often overlooked in policies.

Criterion two is *'being written in an understandable way so employees know what it means'* which is crucial for all HR policies so everyone is clear about what they have to do and what is involved in different procedures. The use of language is important to ensure that jargon and legal references are avoided unless necessary. These issues were confirmed by Ahmed (2008:4):

Policy statements and procedural descriptions should be written using clear language and simple sentences. They should be written to the reading level of the average employee who will have to follow the policies and procedures.

It is also important that the language is unambiguous so that different FLMs will interpret the requirements in the same manner, enabling the organisation to have confidence in their policies being applied consistently. This is important as the work of McHugh (2002) reinforces that it is essential that all absent employees are treated in the same manner, in line with the policy documents. This may help to overcome the problems reported in Bennett (2002) and Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) whereby their research uncovered inconsistencies in the carrying out of return-to-work interviews.

Criterion five is '*defining the role of the key players*' which is a message outlined in the research by Robson (2007b and 2008) and Renwick (2003). This avoids duplication of effort by different stakeholders, or the possibility of some tasks not being carried out at all. This suggests on a basic level the policies are accessible to employees and FLMs and the distribution of roles and responsibilities in the managing absence process is clear. In line with the key theme explored in this study, it is particularly important that FLMs understand their role (Hayday et al., 2007) and the role of others that they need to work with (Cunningham et al., 2004 and Hayday, 2007). This understanding is vital to enable them to be able to manage absence 'effectively' and therefore this addresses one element of the research question that guides this study: *What are the characteristics of first line managers (FLMs) required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?*

It is interesting to observe the next most frequently met criteria are those appearing supportive in tone, for example criterion 21 focuses on being clear about the support for genuinely ill employees and this was apparent in five out of the seven documents under investigation. The existence of references to the commitment of senior management (criterion six) appeared in four of the policies in line with the evidence provided by Huselid (1995) as did evidence that causes of absence are taken into account before taking action (criterion 12). This is important because absences should be treated appropriately, for example; in stress related absences Occupational Health interventions can make a significant impact however if an employee has broken a leg it is unlikely that they will require their advice or support. On a practical level, details of the return to work mechanisms (criterion nine) were provided in four of the policies.

There are also some areas identified where few of the policies managed to cover the criteria, the three areas which were identified the least were:

- Criterion 11 – Distinction between short-term and long-term absences
- Criterion 16 – Clear arrangements for contractual sick pay
- Criterion 17 – Clear arrangements for statutory sick pay (criterion 13)

The lack of distinction between short term and long term absences is very surprising given that good practice suggests these two different types of absence should be treated differently using appropriate management interventions (Hayday, 2007). For example; early interventions in long term absences can minimise the total length of absence by providing rehabilitative treatment (Black, 2008). The non-appearance of information regarding sick pay arrangements was also unexpected as this is clearly an important issue for employees (CIPD, 2007b). Perhaps this omission can be explained because the information should be covered explicitly within individual contracts of employment where entitlements to both statutory and organisational sick pay need to be provided. However, a criticism of including the information in contracts of employment is the wording is not always easy for employees to understand, and most employees are unlikely to access their employment contract on a regular basis.

5.2.1.4. Summary of analysis of absence management policies and procedures

Despite the possibility of having a comprehensive and robust policy if the documents were combined, work by Bevan (2003) emphasises that having an absence policy alone is not enough and that it needs to be implemented accurately and consistently. The wider work of Purcell et al. (2003) is very clear that it is the way that FLMs implement and enact the policies that can make a difference to their impact and effectiveness. Looking specifically at absence management, this is confirmed by Cabinet Office (1998:6) which states:

Generally we found that management policies and processes are in place but that implementation at management level – from the top to the bottom – was inconsistent.

It is therefore essential that FLMs find the policy accessible both physically and in the language that is used (Ahmed, 2008). Maximising their understanding of the policy and its application is likely to require ongoing support (Watson et al., 2007) and the opportunity to build their confidence (Butterfield et al., 2005).

Using detailed criteria in this study also provides the opportunity to provide some practical recommendations for the organisation on how to improve future policies. This would include areas such as ensuring senior management commitment is explicit within the documents, providing details of support mechanisms for returning to work, and being very clear about the organisation's trigger points.

Trigger points are predetermined levels of absence at which point action is required by the FLM (Grinyer and Singleton, 2000), they usually take the form of a specified total number of days of absence over a specific time period, and/or a specified number of occasions of absence over a specified time period. It also seems essential there is no ambiguity about reporting arrangements (Arnott and Emmerson, 2001 and Johnson et al., 2003) and ensuring employees are clear about medical certification requirements. This information should be presented very clearly within a revised single policy and could be supported by checklists for both employees and FLMs to follow to reduce any potential ambiguities (i.e. following the recommendations made by Robson (2008a).

5.2.2. Analysis of organisational HR policies

CIPD (2007d) is clear about the importance of HR policies to enable organisations to develop fair and consistent approaches in managing their employees. In addition, Johnson et al. (2003) reinforce the importance of the policies taking into account the culture of the organisation and being in line with the strategy and aims of the organisation. Quite surprisingly, there are no commonly used checklists for analysing HR policies in this context, though there is often some best practice guidance issued for individual policies from organisations such as CIPD. It was therefore necessary for the author to design a set of criteria to meet the objectives of this study. Using an objective set of criteria facilitated evaluation of the policies, and the ability to be specific about where good practice is being met as well as generating specific recommendations for future policy reviews.

Looking specifically at managing absence, good practice literature (McHugh, 2001 and Hayday et al., 2007) emphasises the need for absence management to be part of a wider HR strategy and this is reflected in the report entitled 'The Well Managed Organisation: Guide for Boards' published by HSE (2006:2) which states: *"Effective absence management is a core discipline for any well-run organisation, but it needs a 'whole systems' approach"*. This justified including an analysis of ten associated HR policies within the research design for this study.

It was hypothesised that there should be evidence of explicit integration between absence management and the content of the HR policies as part of the holistic approach advocated by Bennett (2002). For example, providing details of previous absence history should be an important part of the recruitment and selection stage (Cabinet Office, 2004) and line managers' ability to manage absence should be a criterion within their annual performance review (McGovern et al., 1997).

As one of the aims of this research is to provide tools and analysis to aid generalisability, policies were chosen which should exist in most organisations rather than those unique to GMBC. A reminder of the selected policies is provided in Figure 48.

Figure 48 GMBC's HR policies analysed during this study

- Recruitment and Selection
- Health and Safety
- Discipline and Grievance
- Equal Opportunities
- Flexible working
- Work-life balance
- Home working
- Job sharing
- Training and Development
- Performance Management

As well as looking for specific links with the organisation's absence policy and the concept of managing absence, the policies were also reviewed in terms of general good practice. This includes being written in an accessible format (Ahmed, 2008) and the need to define the roles of different stakeholders (Renwick, 2003). Both of these criteria would specifically aid the role of FLMs when implementing these policies as part of their people management role at GMBC. In line with the aims of this study, the identification of the roles played by FLMs was also a key criterion. A range of HR policies were obtained from GMBC specifically for this purpose and were then analysed in an attempt to see whether absence management was part of a holistic programme. In line with the approach taken to analyse the specific absence documents, the author reviewed the policies from the perspective of an independent researcher and tested the criteria shown in Figure 49.

Figure 49 Criteria used to assess GMBC's general HR policies

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there a clear link to the absence policy? 2. Is there clarity in the responsibilities of different stakeholders? 3. Is the role of FLMs clear? 4. Is the notion of senior management commitment implicit in the policy? 5. Is the policy written in an accessible format? |
|---|

5.2.2.1. Analysis at the individual policy level

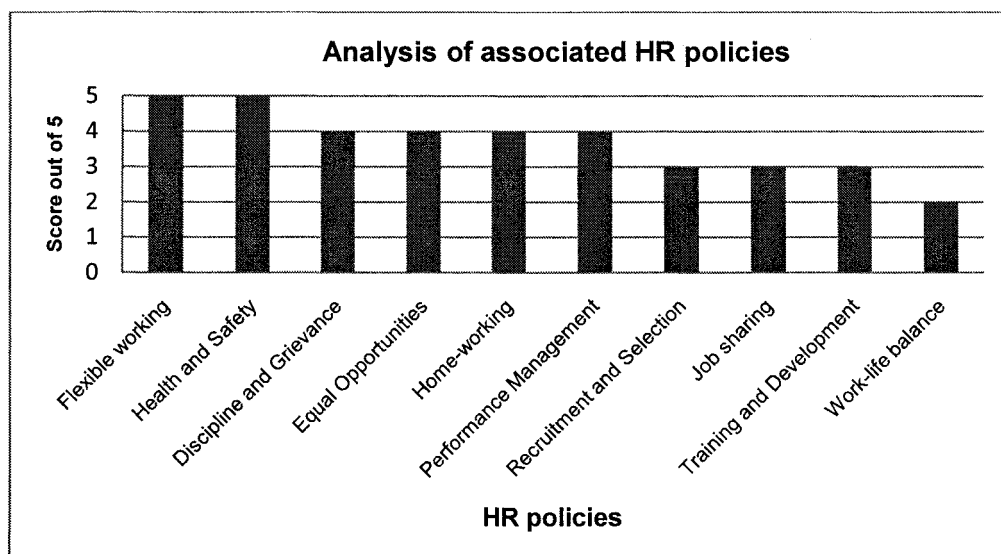
Each of the policies were analysed objectively, using the criteria outlined in Figure 49, to identify their compliance. The criteria were worded quite generically so they could be used for all of the policies, and also to make it viable to gain the maximum score (i.e. there were no unrealistic expectations).

Figure 50 shows the scores for each of the policies against the criteria and a full table of the results is available in Appendix Three showing the specific criteria met for each of the policies in turn. It was initially hypothesised that the policies that were likely to score highly were those which tend to be used on a regular basis such as Recruitment and Selection and Discipline and Grievance. Conceptually, clear links could be made between these two areas of HR and how they are relevant to effective absence management. For example requiring data on absence history at the recruitment stage can be justified because past absence records are usually a good predictor of future absences (Johns and Nicholson, 1982).

In relation to links with a discipline and grievance policy, a poor absence record may be managed by the organisation via their disciplinary policy on the grounds of ill-health or capability (as referred to by Johns, 2003). This approach is used by organisations as it can act as a deterrent to non-genuine absences as well as ensuring consistent action is taken against those with an unacceptable absence record (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002).

Figure 50 demonstrates that two of the assessed documents were able to meet all five of the criteria; these were the Health and Safety and Flexible Working policies. The high score of these individual policies may suggest that they have been organisational policies, or have recently been updated. Unfortunately the dates that the policies were created and updated was not available for this research. Overall the mean score across all of the documents was 3.7 which appears to be quite a positive result where some good practice is already evident, however this may also suggest gaining a score of five is not realistic for all of the policies, or some information may be replicated across policies.

Figure 50 Analysis of associated HR policies



Perhaps the most surprising result was that the work-life balance (WLB) policy document received the lowest rating, despite the fact that there is thought to be a link with levels of absence (Robertson, 2005). Wilkinson (2006) reports the results of the Employee Benefits/HSA Healthcare Research where WLB was found to be the most frequently cited benefit that employers believe has an impact on absence levels, therefore it is important that organisations have a clear policy.

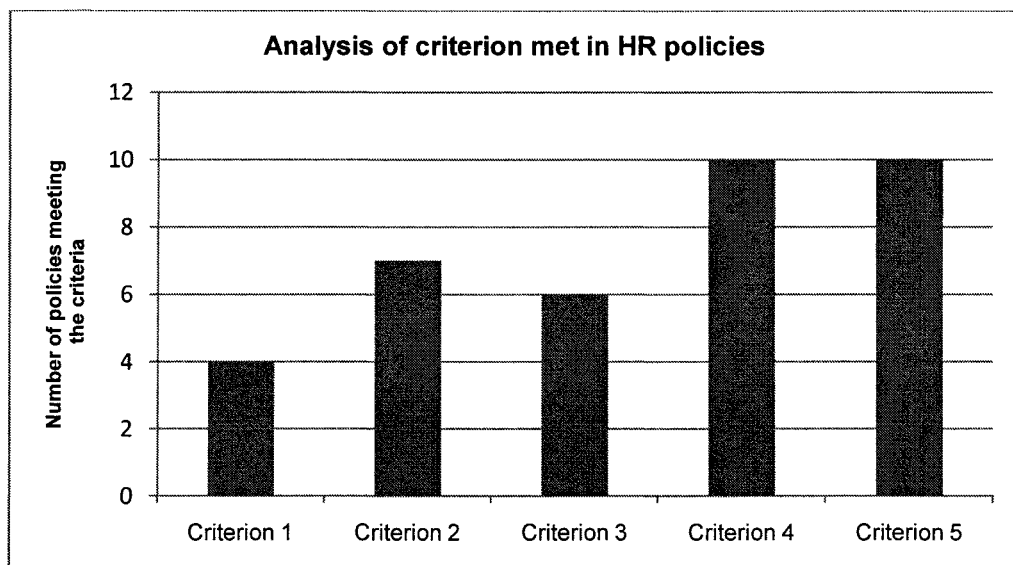
GMBC may have taken a formal decision to separate the WLB and flexible working policies to avoid confusion; alternatively it may have been an unintended omission in the WLB policy. A further explanation may be that some of the content that could have been placed within this policy has been located elsewhere such as in the home-working policy. In its current format (and with the current content) the work-life balance policy is likely to be above average when considering the experience of Hyman and Summers (2004:422) who identify an issue in which *“many policies are informal and unwritten, under the direct control of line managers”*.

Research by Department of Health (2000) states that absence levels are often inflated by the fact that people use ‘sick days’ to deal with WLB related issues and this was substantiated in the work of Bevan (2003). Therefore, promoting a greater awareness of how organisations support WLB may encourage employees to be honest about their reasons for absence (Lewis and Cooper, 1995); particularly where there is separate provision for taking emergency leave to deal with domestic emergencies.

A common issue with the use of WLB policies is that there is often *“uneven adoption”* (Cunningham and Summers, 2004:421) which is a potential problem for organisations who need to demonstrate transparent decision making.

5.2.2.2. Analysis at the individual criteria level

Figure 51 Analysis of criterion used to analyse HR policies



Although the Discipline and Grievance policy achieved a higher score in relation to the five criteria, the policy failed to provide any links with managing absence which was surprising when the tone of the organisation's absence management policies is clear that ultimately the attendance record can lead to action being taken via a disciplinary or grievance process. This is illustrated in quotes from the organisation's absence management procedure as shown in Figure 52 which clearly makes reference to this fact. This implies that it would be beneficial to provide a specific section in the Discipline and Grievance policy to explain how the policy could be invoked due to absence related issues, and provide clear guidelines on how the policy would need to be followed. This would need to comply with the statutory requirements for discipline and grievance issues as per the Employment Act 2002 (Acas, 2006).

Figure 52 Excerpts from Absence Management Procedure (GMBC, 2006c:3)

- *"The employee should be informed that there will need to be a **significant and sustained improvement**, over a period specified by the line manager, in order to avoid the possibility of disciplinary action."*
- *"Where there is no subsequent, significant and sustained improvement, **Line Managers must** contact Human Resources to discuss whether disciplinary action is warranted."*

It seems encouraging that the majority of the policies were judged to have made specific reference to the role of FLMs which is clearly in line with good practice, although there may be practical issues surrounding the differences between rhetoric and reality (Cunningham et al., 2004).

5.2.2.3. Summary of analysis of HR policies

The results presented show that there are pockets of good practice in the policy content of the HR documents that were analysed. This demonstrates that the organisation is aware of the key issues and have begun the process of trying to integrate policies so that the organisation can take a consistent approach. This section also provides specific examples of where additional information should be covered in the documents to enable them to meet the best practice criteria.

5.2.3. Overall summary of GMBC policy analysis

To summarise, the results suggest that in general GMBC's policies do comply with best practice guidance in terms of the roles and responsibilities being clearly defined; explicit senior management commitment and the accessible language used in the documents. However, the information also suggests the absence policy of the organisation is not embedded as holistically as it could be, and this is evidenced in the analysis of the general HR policies where it was not explicitly referred to. This is a potential weakness for the organisation as it may lose out on some of the direct and indirect benefits of having a holistic approach to managing absence (Cabinet Office, 2004). A more comprehensive management process where avoidable absences could be minimised may result in lower staff turnover (Keller, 1984).

One of the challenges for HR practitioners and senior management is the need for continuous review and updating in line with changes in legislation and increased knowledge about good practice (CIPD, 2007d). This may mean it is a staggered process due to the number of policies that exist in organisations. It is therefore possible that GMBC is already aware of how some of the documents could be improved and that this will be incorporated into future revisions.

5.3. Analysis of key internal documents

One of the main purposes of looking at the internal GMBC documents was to establish whether in reality absence is seen as an organisational priority and whether evidence exists within official documents. This is important because there is often a rhetoric and reality situation (McGovern et al., 1997). Valuable information was also obtained through the identification and analysis of previous absence management interventions that have been introduced. Table 24 shows that there were three types of document analysed (employee focused, corporate and councillor led) and lists the documents reviewed during this process.

Table 24 Key internal documents analysed as part of this study

Employee focused	Corporate	Councillor-led
Results of Employee Survey: Guide for employees	Corporate Improvement Plan (2005-06)	Report to Cabinet (15/02/05)
	Learning and Development Framework (2006)	Corporate Vitality Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Minutes of meetings in 2005: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15/02/05, 22/04/05, 20/06/05 • 18/07/05, 05/09/05, 07/11/05 • 05/12/05
	Corporate Vitality 2006/07 Annual Report	Corporate Vitality Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Minutes of meetings in 2006: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 06/01/06, 06/02/06, 06/03/06 • 03/04/06, 12/06/06, 11/09/06 • 16/10/06, 27/11/06
	Corporate Plan 2007-2010	Corporate Vitality Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Minutes of meetings in 2007: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15/01/07, 26/02/07, 22/03/07 • 16/04/07

5.3.1. Employee focused documents

The results from employee surveys were investigated as they can provide a useful insight into the organisation and the perceptions of employees (Lusty, 2007). Saari and Judge (2004:402) comment *“employee surveys, used effectively, can be catalysts for improving employee attitudes and producing organisation change”*.

GMBC commissioned their first employee survey in 2003 in order to find out how their employees felt about the organisation, its practices and the way it is managed. This was an externally managed survey undertaken by an independent research company. The 2003 survey (GMBC, 2003) presented a healthy picture of the organisation. For example, the results stated:

- Employees rated the organisation highly as a good place to work
- Employees felt well informed about what was happening within the organisation
- Employees showed support for senior managers

The 2003 survey reports some areas for development which are relevant to this study, in particular the perception that FLMs did not carry out all of their people management related duties. This is consistent with the work of Renwick (2003) who suggests that an acceptance of HR responsibilities is often found lacking in FLMs and this is confirmed in the work of Peach Martins (2007).

One of the variables that was explored in the conceptual model for this study was length of service and whether there was an association with levels of absence of the FLMs' employees. It was therefore interesting to see that one of the results from the employee survey was that employees who had worked in the organisation for a long time (defined in the survey as ten years or more) tended to be less satisfied, this is the opposite of the expected result summarised by Oshagbemi (2000:213) who details the normal expectation that dissatisfied employees are more likely to leave the organisation and therefore the employees with a long length of service would be expected to be more satisfied. These long-term employees may be more satisfied because of *"better familiarity with their environment, possibly greater established social contacts, better knowledge of processes within their organisations, greater family stability, stability with friendship networks etc."* (Oshagbemi, 2000:222). In relation to the current research this appears to be true as the level of absence for this group of FLMs is significantly lower than the organisational average.

Finally, it was recognised that stress was becoming a more prevalent issue within the organisation which is consistent with the national trends being reported (Thomson et al., 2003 and BITC, 2007). Employers Organisation (2005b:2) confirms the importance of this issue when concluding from their research that:

Stress remained the single most important cause of sickness absence, accounting for just over a fifth of total absence days.

In addition, respondents to the CIPD (2008b) absence survey revealed that 33% of organisations reported an increase in stress related absences over a twelve month period, however this shows a 7% reduction in comparison to the previous year's findings (CIPD, 2007a). This strong trend suggests that organisations should be tackling this issue as a priority.

The second employee survey included in the secondary data analysis was carried out in 2006 (this remains the most recent survey in relation to this work). The questions included were mostly the same, with a few adaptations and new questions for the 2006 version (GMBC, 2006d). There were some very positive outcomes for the organisation:

- The majority of staff are satisfied with their job (68%)
- Communication continues to be a strength
- High levels of awareness of the organisation's aims and objectives

These points are relevant to the context of managing absence, as many studies have established links between job satisfaction and absence (Zaccaro et al. 1991 and Sagie, 1998) as outlined in Chapter Three.

There are also two potential impacts on FLMs, firstly as potential respondents to this survey this may indicate that the majority are satisfied with their jobs. Secondly, if their subordinates are reporting high levels of satisfaction with their job, they may be less likely to take unnecessary absences which reduces some of the administrative burdens on the FLMs (Robson, 2007b). Within the results it is also clear that FLMs are held in high regard by their subordinates and that there are a range of other associated positive outcomes which may be relevant to creating a environment conducive to managing absence effectively.

Nevertheless, a number of areas for future development were identified including the need to improve some forms of internal communication between different stakeholders; reduced satisfaction with the staff benefits package (though interestingly the respondents were generally satisfied when just considering pay) and stress as a widespread issue. In relation to the research question which guides this study, the review of the extant literature emphasised the importance of communication between different stakeholders (Dibben et al., 2001a). It is therefore essential that FLMs communicate with other stakeholders in the managing absence process, particularly senior managers and HR.

Despite the effective management of absence being an increasing priority for GMBC it is interesting to note neither version of the survey asked questions specifically related to absence. This may be a topic that the organisation could consider integrating into future surveys. Whilst there are no explicit questions on absence, it is clear many of the areas which have previously been shown to

have an association with levels of absence are covered. This includes areas such as: job satisfaction (Farrell and Stamm, 1988); organisation commitment (Bennett, 2002) and management style (Johnson et al., 2003).

5.3.2. Analysis of corporate documents

As absence levels are one of the best value performance indicators (BVPI) that have to be reported on an annual basis by public sector organisations, the organisation cannot avoid providing a commentary on their existing levels. As GMBC have higher than average levels of absence (CBI, 2008 and CIPD, 2008b) and are placed within the bottom quartile of Local Authorities (GMBC, 2006b) it should be a priority for the organisation.

The Corporate Vitality Plan for 2006-07 (GMBC, 2007a) confirms that the results for the year 2006-2007 were disappointing as the average figure was 13.13 days in comparison to the target level of 12.25 days; the plan confirms that further actions are needed in this area. This aim is further confirmed within the organisation's forward looking Corporate Plan for 2007-2010 (GMBC, 2007c) which defines targets for the three financial years that it covers.

The review of the internal documents began by identifying evidence of managing absence (and levels of absence) as a priority at the strategic level. Evidence was found in a number of strategic documents where current levels of absence were highlighted before identifying the need for a reduction in absence levels for the future. The Corporate Vitality 2006-07 report (GMBC, 2007a) expresses disappointment about increased levels of absence but states this issue will be "*a regular item for scrutiny*". This clearly states the focus on absence management will become an ongoing issue priority

Within the forward looking plan for 2007-2010 (GMBC, 2007b), the management of absence is located within *Corporate Priority 6: Ensuring a Sustainable Gateshead*. The specific target stated is by 2010 levels of sickness absence should be reduced from 12.29 to 10.25 days per employee per year. The provision of specific targets is clearly in line with good practice (CIPD, 2007a) and this is not routinely carried out by all organisations according to the latest CIPD survey (2008b) which found that only 40% of respondents had formal targets. However, the plan does not provide any detail on how this could

be achieved and whether there are any resourcing implications. In relation to benchmark targets set by other Local Authorities over a three year period, the target level of absence reduction by GMBC appears to be consistent (Robson, 2008a).

5.3.3. Analysis of Councillor-led documents

The work of McHugh (2002) and Cabinet Office (2004) state the need for senior management commitment to manage absence effectively. This can be expanded further within the context of the public sector because of the role played by the elected members (Councillors), so it is important that they are also committed to reducing absence.

The research discovered that in terms of absence management, the Committee responsible for overseeing this area is the Corporate Vitality Overview and Scrutiny (CVOS) Committee under their scope of *management of resources* (GMBC, 2007c). The remit of the CVOS Committee involves evaluating existing practices and agreeing the way forward to meet the future targets for levels of absence. The Strategic Director of HR reports to this Committee on managing absence and both suggests and implements appropriate interventions.

The list of documents in Table 24 shows the CVOS Committee met 18 times over the period of time focused on in this research and the initial quantitative overview demonstrated that absence was discussed on the agenda of seven out of the eighteen meetings (38.9%). However further analysis found that only three out of the seven meetings actually discussed the issues in detail, with the remaining meetings focusing solely on the absence figures that had been presented to them. It is difficult to suggest whether the issue of absence has been discussed sufficiently because of the wide scope of issues that this Committee is accountable for (as shown in Figure 53). In addition, there are 65 performance indicators in the area of Corporate Vitality (GMBC, 2007a) which makes it clear that the Committee have a large range of issues to discuss and progress within their monthly meetings. This is an important part of this research for two reasons: firstly the use of this research method which has not been utilised before; and secondly in setting the scene for how absence is managed at GMBC. This has a direct impact on being able to address the research question as the FLMS are charged with enacting the action points from these Committee meetings.

Figure 53 Overview of scope of CVOS Committee

1. The management of the Council's financial, human and physical resources
2. Support for the democratic process
3. The involvement of the people and communities of Gateshead in the work of the Council
4. Social inclusion, equalities and diversity
5. The Council's arrangements for securing efficiency and value for money; the development and operation of the Council's procurement strategy and the Council's improvement plan

Closer examination of the documents revealed three out of the seven (dated 20th June 2005, 6th March 2006 and 26th February 2007) contained only a reference to the absence figures and targets and did not include any narrative. This means they did not provide any useful indications in terms of specific details which provided evidence of absence management being an organisational priority. The three meetings which focused specifically on understanding absence (and reducing levels of it) took place on 28th February 2005, (CVOSC, 2005a) 16th October 2006 (CVOSC, 2006a) and 16th April 2007 (CVOSC, 2007a) and were analysed in more detail as information regarding actions taken and recommendations were discussed. Within the three meetings where absence was a principle agenda item, there is evidence that a thorough analysis of the situation was carried out, followed by appropriate action points and interventions.

The meeting on 28th February 2005 was attended by the Strategic Director of Human Resources who advised the Committee of the ongoing problems with higher than average levels of sickness absence. An action plan was agreed at this meeting on how the organisation could investigate this matter further by carrying out internal and external research into current practices. Timescales were agreed for carrying out this work. The results of which would be reported at a later meeting of the CVOS Committee. This seemed to be the first step in identifying the strategic importance of managing absence effectively and reflected the perceived severity of the situation.

The second key meeting which took place on 16th October 2006 (CVOSC, 2006c) had a strong focus on reviewing and improving the existing absence management practices. It is interesting that this meeting took place over a year after the previous meeting which focused on absence, which suggests perhaps the issue was not an ongoing priority. Within this meeting it was clearly

recognised that the organisation had a perceived problem but at the same time, was showing a commitment towards improving the situation. The problem was actually identified at Cabinet Level which confirms the issue was found at a strategic level, and they tasked the CVOS Committee to investigate the issue in more detail. This is consistent with the views of the key informants as it was identified as a problem at the top level and also confirms the benchmarking that took place with the absence levels from other North East Councils. In its efforts to try and understand the problems and seek appropriate solutions, the Committee took several steps as shown in Figure 54.

Figure 54 Stages undertaken in the absence management review process

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of existing internally generated absence data • Review of best practice guidelines from Cabinet Office, HSE CBI and CIPD • Presentations from staff outlining the current procedures and plans for improvement • Presentations from external (high performing) organisations • Benchmarking data and absence policies from other Local Authorities • An externally conducted audit of their Occupational Health provision • Views and suggestions from the Trade Unions on how absence is managed |
|--|

The sources of information referred to in Figure 54 demonstrate that the organisation conducted a thorough review and consulted with a number of the key internal and external stakeholders. The external stakeholders included organisations such as Rotherham Council who have successfully managed to reduce their absence levels and have sustained these reductions for over three years.

The use of benchmarking appears positive as this is highly recommended by Robson (2008a) and CIPD (2008b) as a way of understanding the issue within its context. It also demonstrates that the organisation made proactive attempts to try and identify the most effective and appropriate strategies and practices. It is also positive that they not only looked at 'best practice' organisations such as CIPD but also organisations comparable to GMBC in terms of context profile.

Whilst benchmarking is useful it is also important that the organisation considers its individual circumstances so that contextual factors can be acknowledged (Johnson et al., 2003). There is also some evidence that different stakeholders from the organisation were involved in presenting their ideas for how the systems could be improved.

This is clearly in line with the recommendations from Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) on normal HR policies and by Johnson et al. (2003) who focus specifically on absence management policies. Whilst Trade Unions appear to have been involved in the consultation exercise, there is nothing to indicate that FLMs were involved in this process. This could be seen as a potential weakness in the consultation and also loses out on gaining the views of these very important stakeholders (Purcell et al., 2003) who have the crucial role of implementing the practices and procedures. Their inclusion may also have helped the organisation to gain their buy-in and support for any revisions to the new system (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003). Another simple but effective evaluation tool was also used which involved a thorough investigation of the internally generated absence data. This is vital but often under-used by organisations (Edwards, 1982) and is confirmed in the findings of seven companies who were investigated by Dunn and Wilkinson (2002:236) who commented “*Absence reports tended to be viewed as a useful tool to back up a manager’s instinct rather than alerting him/her to a specific problem*”.

Undertaking this evaluation of the absence data process proactively would have enabled GMBC to ensure that they understood what the main problems were which is necessary in order to be able to generate appropriate solutions (Edwards, 1982). This assumes that the data was analysed accurately and that appropriate inferences were drawn from it, including the recognition of potential external influences. FLMs can gain direct benefits from receiving accurate and up-to-date data (Arnott and Emmerson, 2001) as it allows them to take the most appropriate action(s). Following on from the consultation process, a number of key issues were highlighted in the review. The summary of issues (shown in Figure 55) demonstrates an understanding of the holistic framework needed.

Figure 55 Key issues identified in internal review

- Need to establish and maintain a continuing commitment from management
- Sickness information should be provided continuously at every level of the Council
- Clear procedures for line managers specifying both quantity and quality of interventions required to manage absence
- Managers need training so that they can apply policies consistently
- Return to work interviews should take place after every absence and counselling interviews should take place when an employee hits a trigger point
- Managers need to maintain supportive contact with absent employees
- Review levels of resourcing for the Occupational Health unit

Less tangible issues such as management commitment which are raised in Figure 55 may be difficult to define and measure and it may be naïve to assume managers will be more efficient simply through participation on a training programme (Lawler and Hackman, 1969). It is essential that organisations work to establish and maintain management commitment as Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) are very clear about the important role FLMs play in bringing policies to life.

The issue of absence data is tackled which is in line with the suggestions offered by Robson (2007a) and in line with the practices suggested by Acas (2006). The Committee have also addressed the issue of access, time and speed, as FLMs often complain that they do not receive the data in a timely fashion which means that it is difficult for them to use the information.

A very strong message in the internal review is the need for policies and practices to be articulated clearly and to be used consistently by all managers within the organisation. The issue of clear wording is consistent with general good practice on policy development and should ensure that all employees are able to understand it and what their role is in it (Ahmed, 2008). FLMs will need support to be able to carry out the policy consistently (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002) and this is likely to be achieved through the provision of an appropriate training programme to develop their skills, confidence and knowledge (Bennett, 2002).

Recent practitioner based surveys on absence such as the annual CIPD absence survey (CIPD, 2008b) consistently identify the most frequently used absence management intervention as being the return-to-work interview. This is also consistent with more empirical research findings (e.g. Hayday et al., 2007) which aim to identify the most effective interventions. More specific recommendations provided by the organisation state that *“service groups should establish monitoring systems to ensure that return-to-work and counselling interviews are being carried out”* (CVOS Committee (2005a). This is an important point as the interviews can only be useful when they are actually carried out in a timely manner by the relevant FLM (Hayday, 2006).

However, it is also important to highlight that looking at the quantity of interviews alone is unlikely to be sufficient, therefore GMBC should also look at establishing a system which is capable of monitoring the quality of the return-to-work interviews (Arnott and Emmerson, 2001). As well as identifying good practices, this may also identify some areas for development so that FLMs can receive appropriate training to meet their specific needs (Robson, 2007b).

Figure 55 also highlights the importance of the role played by Occupational Health as they can play a pivotal role in supporting employees to return to work and yet this service is often not included in internal reviews (James et al., 2002). Many of the issues identified were of a very practical nature such as the need for clear and unambiguous procedures, the carrying out of return to work interviews after every absence and maintaining supportive contact with absent employees. However, the report does not provide a focus on how these interventions can be successfully introduced or identify some of the main barriers which may need to be overcome.

A number of clear recommendations were generated by the report as shown in Figure 56, where many of the proposals are positive, e.g. taking a proactive approach to the health of employees and the provision of discounted health and fitness activities; which is an approach advocated by Stevens (2005) as well as within the best practice literature (CIPD, 2008b, Acas, 2006) and within governmental publications (Cabinet Office, 2004 and National Audit Office, 2004b). This is also in line with the most recent recommendations by Black (2008) which was outlined in Chapter Three.

Figure 56 Recommendations for improving absence management practices

- Service Groups (SGs) should establish monitoring systems to ensure that return-to-work and counselling interviews are being carried out
- SGs organise systems to track employees with poor absence records more closely
- SGs should consider the implementation of Sickness Boards to discuss the most serious cases of sickness absence in their service areas
- Heads of Service to consider their quarterly targets and ensure that appropriate actions are taken to meet them
- Maintain and develop existing links with best practice and benchmarking groups
- The Occupational Health Unit should take a more proactive role in health improvement
- GMBC will support the provision of discounted employee health and fitness activities
- The Occupational Health Unit will be refurbished so that it is fit for purpose
- Work in collaboration with other Authorities

Figure 56 also provides evidence of recognition by the organisation that there will be occasions when absence levels become unsatisfactory (through either genuine or non-genuine absence) and rehabilitation will not be possible in every individual case. The implementation of Sickness Boards appears to be a positive step to treating such cases consistently and within a timelier period than in the past.

The recommendations provide some evidence to support the fact that the organisation are trying to take a long-term view on the issue. For example: they state their intention to continue their benchmarking and working collaboratively with other Local Authorities. This suggests that the organisation appreciates that there is no short term fix to the absence problem as confirmed in the work of McHugh (2001 and 2002). Fewer than expected recommendations are at an operational level and added detail would bring the organisation further into line with good practice in relation to absence management. For example, when implementing more efficient tracking of sickness records and establishing monitoring systems to ensure FLMs are carrying out their duties in relation to returning employees. It is believed these steps could have been taken further such as the inclusion of performance in managing absence as a criterion within the performance management process for FLMs. Whilst there is a recommendation about performance management focused on Heads of Service, this remains purely quantitative and does not encourage senior managers to look at specific interventions.

Six months after the publication of the recommendations of the committee, the third key meeting took place on 16th April 2007 (CVOS Committee, 2007b) within the timeframe for this study. The focus for this meeting was to review progress since the last meeting by looking specifically at how the recommendations were implemented. Evidence is provided to show some of the Committee's earlier recommendations had been implemented such as the monitoring of return-to-work interviews; however Figure 57 (GMBC, 2007d) shows that when this was audited by HR, the results were disappointing for CBS in comparison to their colleagues in CES.

Figure 57 Percentage of return-to-work interviews completed

Service Area	Percentage completed
Community Based Services (CBS)	45.5%
Central Services (CES)	90%

Figure 57 shows Central Services (CES) carried out almost double the amount of interviews than their Community Based Services (CBS) colleagues which is a substantial difference. However, it must be acknowledged that CBS is a much larger department than CES and therefore there are many more interviews needing to be carried out in addition to the fact that CBS have consistently significantly higher levels of absence. This may also be related to spans of control as FLMS in CES have very small teams in comparison with their CBS colleagues, and Smulders (1983) and Doran et al. (2004) provided evidence of a correlation between team size and levels of sickness absence.

It should be recognised that it is a positive step that this monitoring is now taking place as it allows the organisation to gain a real picture of how absence is being managed by its employees. A number of positive stories were reported including partnerships with NHS awareness initiatives and the winning of a Highly Commended Trophy for participation in the *Think Fit Challenge* organised by the British Heart Foundation (GMBC, 2007d).

This demonstrates that the organisation is trying to make a continuing approach to improving the health and well-being of their employees, in line with the recommendations from Baptiste (2008). A limitation of this type of internal report is that no data is available on participation rates and the characteristics of the employees taking part.

The concept of rewarding attendance had been investigated in advance of the meeting by looking at what other organisations offer as well as taking legal advice on the implications of issues such as the Disability Discrimination Act. Whilst it is unlikely a financial incentive programme could be set up due to the Local Government terms and conditions of employment (Harvey and Nicholson, 1993), it is positive that the organisation is exploring all possible avenues.

The timeline for the production for this report was six months after the initial recommendations were made; therefore it is possible that it is too early to see the benefits of the interventions as the Cabinet Office (2004) suggests it can take up to two years for any real results to become apparent. It is promising that the Committee concludes the report by detailing the next steps to be undertaken, this demonstrates a commitment by the organisation to understand and tackle the problem despite their limited success to date.

This includes the provision of training for FLMS as advocated by Williams (2008), ensuring return-to-work interviews are carried out and a continuing pledge to proactive interventions (BITC, 2007).

Outside of the CVOS Committee, a meeting on 22nd April 2005 (Parkinson, 2005) looked specifically at the role of stress in relation to absence management and uses evidence gained from the employee survey results. As a consequence of this meeting, it was agreed appropriate rehabilitative resources would be available to employees suffering from stress, with a view to minimising time off due to sickness absence. The document does highlight their approach is to try and support employees through the use of a stress policy rather than using it as a punitive approach. Following this meeting GMBC's Wellbeing at Work policy was approved. This appears to provide evidence of the organisation trying to take a proactive role in improving the health of their employees and was conducted well in advance of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Stress standards being brought into place. Information was not provided on whether this policy was taken out into consultation with stakeholders before being brought to the Committee.

Despite investing time and resources into trying to reduce absence to their target levels, this has not resulted in a significant decrease in levels of absence which is confirmed in the report (GMBC, 2007d) which states:

Despite all of the initiatives taken, sickness absence remains a very difficult area to address and unfortunately recent figures indicate that sickness absence levels are actually increasing (GMBC, 2007d).

This is undoubtedly frustrating for the organisation as their investment is high in relation to many other organisations, but unfortunately they have yet to be successful in making an impact on reducing their levels of sickness absence.

5.4. Summary: Secondary data sources

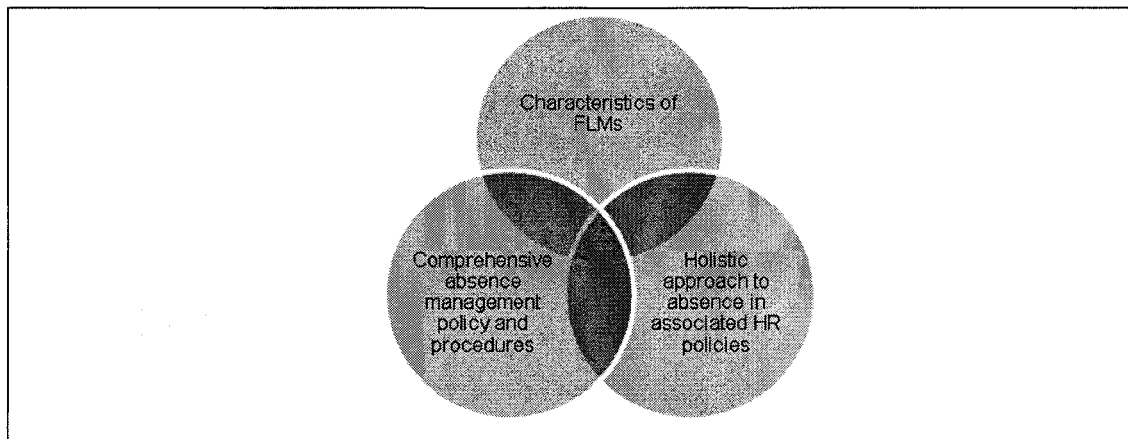
This chapter has provided a valuable insight into how GMBC currently manage absence, through consideration of secondary data specifically related to managing absence and also other relevant HR areas. This facilitates the generation of specific recommendations which are presented in Chapter Seven.

In addition the discussion has illustrated that the content and implementation of these policies might have the potential to have an impact on FLMs and their ability to manage absence; thereby addressing the following objective of this research:

- To investigate how absence should be managed holistically through analysis of the organisation's absence management policies to support the role played by FLMs

This association is illustrated in the framework shown in Figure 58 which shows that the three areas are inter-related.

Figure 58 Framework demonstrating the links between characteristics of FLMs and the importance of policies



One of the positive features of GMBC appears to be their willingness to embrace new initiatives as well as trying to engage in best practice interventions. One example of innovation which has been uncovered through this chapter is the use of counselling interviews. This is an area of strength for the organisation as it moves away from the sometimes prescriptive and admin-focused return-to-work interviews. GMBC seems to be leading the way in trialling different types of interventions despite the fact that they have yet to receive the benefits of their investment.

The organisation appears to make effective use of benchmarking both in terms of current performance and also to investigate good practice taking place in other organisations. This is evidenced in the relationships they have set up with organisations which have experience of reducing absences. This external focus and drive that they are engaged in can be positive as it allows the organisation to make decisions based on a wider knowledge base and can benefit from the experience (both positive and negative) of others.

The overwhelming conclusion from this chapter is that GMBC engage in many best practice practices according to their policy documents and meeting notes. This includes the use of return-to-work interviews (Bennett, 2002); an organisation specific absence policy (Johnson et al., 2003) trigger points (Acas, 2006); some evidence of embedding absence into related HR areas (McHugh, 2001); efficient recording of absences (National Audit Office, 2006); monitoring of absence levels (Cabinet Office, 2004); and use of penalties where appropriate (Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) and senior management commitment (McHugh, 2002).

GMBC appear to have demonstrated their commitment to reducing absence through time and resources, yet their absence levels have continued to increase. This implies they have yet to identify the significant factors which they can use to minimise existing levels of absence and develop a culture whereby employees are only absent when they genuinely need to be and are unable to attend work. However, it has to be highlighted that there are some factors outside of the control of the organisation and it is not known to what extent they may impact on levels of absence. A limitation of this chapter is that its focus is solely on secondary data, it is not possible to gauge the extent to which the rhetoric matches the reality. To some extent, the reality will be uncovered within the next chapter when the survey results present the views of the FLMs who participated.

This chapter has contributed to the first objective '*To design and implement an appropriate methodology and quantitative methods to investigate how FLMs can reduce absence*' by providing an objective analysis of the secondary data, using a combination of secondary data analysis methods. The quantitative survey results are presented within the second of the data analysis chapters (Chapter 6).

The second objective to this chapter '*To analyse the data and synthesise with the literature review in order to progress the current theory base and enable an original contribution to knowledge*' has also been partially addressed through the objective analysis of the secondary data. The remaining analysis of the survey data is presented in the next chapter to fulfil this objective in its entirety.

This chapter demonstrates a contribution to knowledge through the diverse range of research methods employed, to present an objective review of the organisation's practices. In particular, the tools and criteria developed to rate the organisation's policies could be replicated across other organisations.

The next chapter presents the primary data which has been collected and analysed to address the objectives of this study. This consists of the presentation and analysis of the survey data which was completed by FLMs from across two divisions at GMBC. This progresses the research question for this study by investigating the 21 hypotheses to identify the characteristics required of FLMs to effectively manage absence in the UK public sector.

Chapter Six

Research Findings:

Survey of FLMS at Gateshead Council

6.1. Introduction

This data analysis chapter presents the findings of the questionnaire distributed to FLMS and addresses the research question of this study: *What are the characteristics of FLMS required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?* The following research objective is also met explicitly within this chapter through the identification of key measures relating to or explaining levels of individual absence:

- To establish the characteristics of FLMS required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations by involving FLMS in primary research.

The chapter also contributes towards the following objectives for this study:

- To design and implement an appropriate methodology and quantitative methods to establish the characteristics of FLMS required to 'effectively' manage absence.
- To analyse the data and synthesise with extant research in order to progress the current theory base and enable an original contribution to knowledge.

In relation to the first objective, this chapter demonstrates that appropriate quantitative methods were used to design the survey and analyse the responses. This is evidenced in the employment of appropriate statistical tests to provide meaningful data, which allows the acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses.

Looking at the second objective, this chapter focuses on the analysis of the data through the use of appropriate quantitative analysis techniques. This includes univariate analysis, testing for internal reliability, analysis within groups and tests of significance.

In relation to the third objective, the conceptual model (originally introduced in Chapter Three) for this study is used as a framework to structure the analysis and discussion of the survey results and synthesise them with extant research.

6.2. Structure of the chapter

This chapter begins by setting the context of the survey; this is achieved by presenting the response rates for the overall survey as well as identifying the questions which received the highest number of non-responses. Inclusion of the overall response rate alongside response rates for individual questions also provides useful information to understand the context of this study. The characteristics of the survey respondents are outlined before focusing on analysing the responses to the survey questions.

The investigation of the data begins with the results of the univariate analysis of each individual question alongside a commentary of the key results. This is followed by a recap of the hypotheses for the study and then the corresponding analysis driven by these hypotheses. These results are presented by looking at each hypothesis and sub-hypotheses in turn, including a review of whether the null hypothesis can be accepted or rejected at a standard, pre-set level of statistical significance. The presentation of these research results is complemented by a synthesis of the research that was explored within the earlier review of classic and contemporary studies in the field. This approach allows the clear identification of the contribution to knowledge offered by this study and suggests as appropriate whether the hypothesis, and in turn the established theory, should be upheld or rejected. This theory testing approach to the research is consistent with the positivist methodology justified in Chapter Four.

This chapter is concluded by drawing attention to issues of potential errors as well as the limitations of the approach, followed by the closing summary and introduction to the next chapter.

6.3. Response rate

89 completed surveys were returned to the researcher, unfortunately due to the exact size of the population being unknown within the organisation, it was necessary to refer to the estimates provided by senior HR staff within the organisation. This number was estimated to be between 200-225 FLMs within the two chosen departments. This would lead to a conservative estimate of a response rate of 44.5% (based on a population of 200 FLMs) or 39.5% (based on a higher population of 225 FLMs). This compares favourably with research discussed by Saunders et al. (2006) who report typical response rates of 10-20% for postal surveys.

Out of the 89 responses, all of the forms were usable as they had completed the overwhelming majority of the questions. All missing responses were coded when they were inputted to show whether the lack of response was due to the preceding question being answered in a certain way, which caused the particular question to be inappropriate. Saunders et al. (2007) also believe it can be useful to look at response rates for individual questions. In this instance, it is possible to draw inferences as to why some of the questions were not answered and this is discussed within the next chapter. The mean number of missing responses for each of the 103 questions contained in the survey is 2.34 which appears to suggest a very high response rate on a question by question basis. However, three of the questions had a significantly higher non-response rate as shown in Table 25; this is considered to be consistent with the nature of this study into a sensitive area of HR. It should also be highlighted that 25 questions achieved a 100% response rate.

Table 25 Questions with highest non-response rates

Question number	Question	Missing responses %	Potential reason for missing responses
A3	Please state which sub-department you work in e.g. Supported Housing	29.2%	As some of the departments are small respondents may have worried about their anonymity.
B3	Over the last year what is the average number of days absence for your team?	23.6%	Past research suggests many FLMs are not aware of this figure and therefore are unable to provide it.
E1.4	Please give four words that you think describes your management style when you are managing the absence of your staff	19.1%	Question E1.4 asks for the fourth word and as there are far fewer missing responses for the first three words it is reasonable to assume they may not have been able to think of a fourth word.

6.4. Characteristics of respondents

The majority of respondents (87.5%) work within the Community Based Services (CBS) division with only 10.2% being from Central Services (CES) and 2.3% not providing this information. This appears to be representative of the total number of employees within the two departments (2,400 employees in CBS compared to 650 employees in CES).

The larger number of CBS respondents has to be recognised, as Chapter Two highlighted how this division is influenced by some environmental factors that are widely accepted in previous research on employees working within a social services based context. For example, Horder's (1999) research indicated that if work-related injuries or illnesses were excluded from the headline statistics the average amount of absence would be reduced significantly.

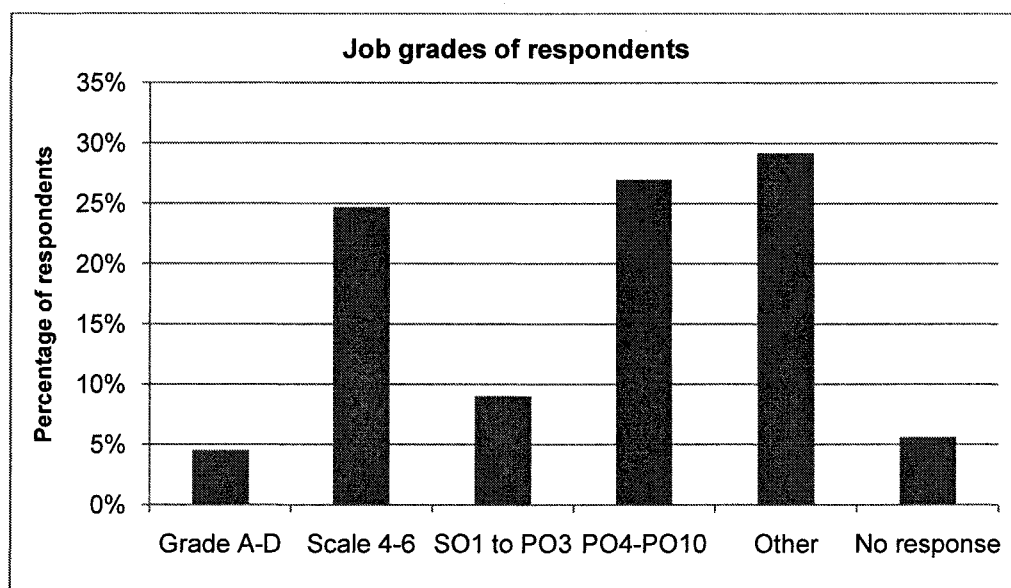
Respondents to this survey were located across ten departments across the two service areas of CBS and CES. This provides a rich diversity of functions and responsibilities in which the respondents work and allows the research to obtain a wider picture of practices in the organisation. This may also increase the support for generalisability as the structure of these two divisions is common with that implemented by other Local Authorities. The areas where the respondents are situated was further broken down into thirty sub-departments, to provide a closer level of detail. Unfortunately, there were a high number of respondents (29.2%) who failed to specify the sub-department they are based in, this may be because they were anxious about potentially being identified. The main limitation of this is that absence levels from the smaller teams cannot be matched with these missing responses, though this appears to be a common limitation across sickness absence studies in general.

The majority of the respondents (70.8%) are female which was expected given the high number of responses from the CBS division (87.5% of respondents). In line with the findings of Millard and Machin (2007), the age profile of the FLMS was found to be quite typical for the public sector, with a significant majority of employees (85.1%) aged 40 years or over. When asked about their total length of service at Gateshead Council, 73% of respondents stated they had worked at the organisation for 10 years or more.

More than two thirds of the respondents (68.5%) had previously worked in a non-management role at Gateshead Council which is interesting as this group of people may be considered to be '*poacher turned gamekeeper*' and therefore they may have had experience of how absence is managed by the organisation from a different perspective. The results also show that 44.9% of these FLMs are now managing in the department in which they worked before gaining their FLM status. There are challenges associated with making this move from employee to manager and it can affect the working relationship when managing former colleagues (Bolton, 2003; Loo and Thorpe, 2004) which may also affect how the employees respond to the way that the FLMs manage absence.

There is a wide spread of job grades for the people who consider themselves to be FLMs as shown in Figure 59. This is interesting as it highlights that employees on very different salary levels are required to carry out the same absence management duties. This raises a question as to whether a 'one size fits all' approach is appropriate, whereby all FLMs carry out the same tasks in absence management.

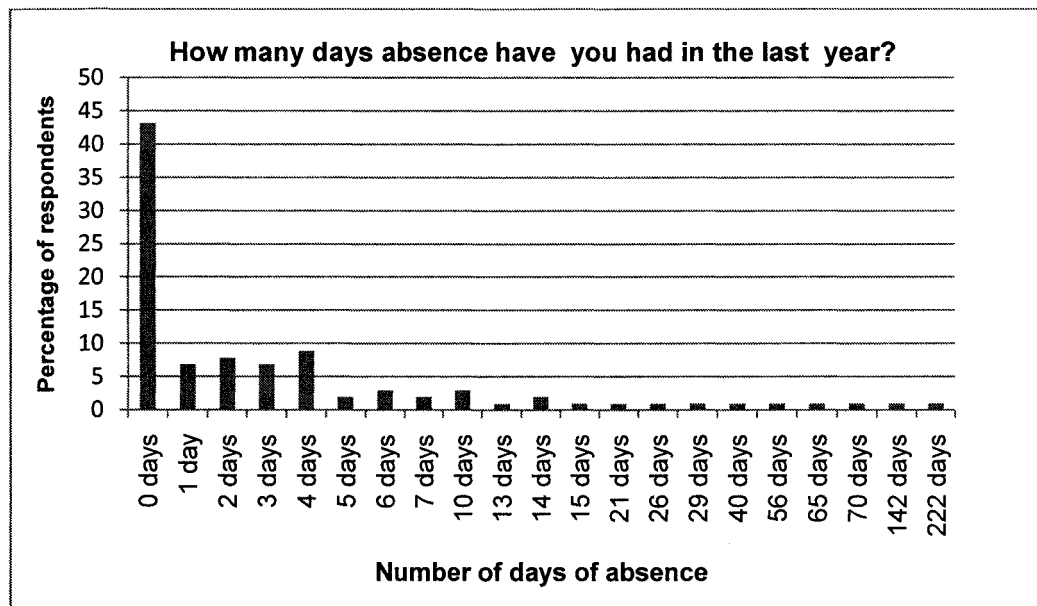
Figure 59 Respondents by job grade



Respondents were asked to provide details of their personal absence record (as shown in Figure 60), the mean number reported was 9.76 days which is considerably lower than the overall organisational average of 14 days (GMBC, 2007a). This result is consistent with the work of Garcia (1987) who indicated that managers have less absence than employees with no management responsibility.

However, careful analysis of the data shows the skewness coefficient is 4.428 indicating a recognisable right skew which means using the mean is not the most appropriate method of central tendency. The median number of days of absence is one day which presents a very different picture and utilising this measure of central tendency means that the level of absence is significantly lower than the national average of 8 days (CIPD, 2008b).

Figure 60 Number of days of absence reported by respondents



To present the data accurately it should also be highlighted that 43.8% of the respondents stated they had zero days of absence over the previous year. Unsurprisingly, the number of occasions of absence is also significantly lower than the average for the overall organisation, with a mean of 1.18 occasions of absence per employee per year. In light of the finding that over 85% of the respondents are aged 40 or over, it is particularly surprising to have such a low absence rate as research by Bevan et al. (2004) suggests that this age-range may be more susceptible to longer absences. The composition of the survey sample has to be taken into consideration when discussing the results. One illustration of this is that 70.8% of the respondents are female and they may have a different perspective on the way that absence is managed (Moore et al., 2005).

6.5. Investigation of data

6.5.1. Absence in your team

It is clear from the survey data that team sizes vary quite substantially within the Council with a range of 799 employees, which provides a mean of 32.68 employees per FLM. However, this dataset is skewed quite heavily by the respondent who stated they had 800 subordinates and if this case were removed from the dataset the mean would reduce significantly to 23.65 employees per person. This revised average number of days of absence was used for all of the analysis of the survey data.

An important element of this questionnaire involved asking the respondents to provide the average number of days of absence for their team. The mean response for this question is 53.43 days per employee per year which raises questions when you considering the average number of days for the organisation is only 14 days. Looking more closely at the data identified a number of respondents who stated their average was over 100 days per employee, with one providing an average of 645 days per person for a team of 14 employees. Consideration was also given to the organisational absence data which did not confirm these findings, however this also led the researcher to believe that some of the respondents had not understood the question properly and may therefore have used the figure for total absence for the team rather than the average. This is clearly a limitation of the questionnaire and is addressed within the earlier research methods chapter.

The two divisions used for this survey (CBS and CES) operate in different contexts and if they were not in the public sector, they would be likely to be classified very differently in terms of the work that they carry out. A simple overall distinction could be made by dividing the divisions into manual (CBS) and non-manual (CES) employees and using those classifications, CIPD (2008b) suggests that absence is significantly higher in manual occupations. Divisions that include Social Services functions consistently have the highest absence levels across English Local Authorities (Employers Organisation, 2005a) and this has been a consistent pattern for many years. This can be attributed mainly to the jobs that the employees are required to carry out, as well as some of the environmental conditions, and is consistent with the findings

from this primary research where the mean number of days was significantly higher in CBS (36.68 days) in comparison to CES (11.07 days).

6.5.2. Your role in managing absence at Gateshead Council

There is clear evidence within the literature that one of the key issues in FLMS carrying out HR functions is whether or not they accept that people management tasks are their responsibility (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003). IPD (1995) is clear that absence levels are lowest in situations where this is the case.

Respondents were asked a question whereby they had to identify which group or groups of stakeholders had responsibility for different aspects of managing absence. This question was used to test their knowledge of the organisation's policy and procedures as well as testing whether the FLMS understand the tasks for which they are responsible. FLMS need to have a comprehensive knowledge of absence management policies and procedures in order to discharge their responsibilities (McHugh, 2002). A summary of the results are shown in Table 26, frequencies are provided rather than percentages to reflect that respondents were able to tick more than one box.

Table 26 Responsibility for managing different aspects of absence

	You	Your line manager	HR Department	Senior Managers	Trade Unions	Occ Health
Ensuring that the Disability Discrimination Act is adhered to.	65	55	56	40	27	29
Monitoring absence levels across Directorates.	14	21	57	48	3	9
Ensuring that the absence policy is followed.	84	57	43	31	13	18
Making sure that all employees are aware of the Council's policy.	80	40	41	37	14	9
Analysing departmental absence records	31	42	53	41	3	5
Ensuring that employees understand the impact of absence on the Council.	81	63	39	46	17	12
Monitoring individual absence records	75	45	23	15	0	3
Identifying when a trigger point has been reached.	56	34	48	13	1	2

Table 26 Responsibility for managing different aspects of absence (continued)

Carrying out return-to-work interviews	86	32	5	11	0	1
Managing persistent short term absences	77	48	20	15	1	8
Managing long term absences	71	56	40	27	6	25
Encouraging good attendance	84	43	23	31	5	6
Treating all employees fairly	84	53	49	47	33	28
Advising first line managers on complex cases	44	32	46	19	7	17
Initiating advice from Occupational Health	66	51	21	14	2	17

The results from Table 26 are interesting as the respondents indicate they (as FLMs) recognise the key role they play in nearly all aspects of managing absence, whereas existing research suggests this is not always the case (IPD, 1995; Bennett, 2002).

There appears to be some ambiguity over certain tasks, such as who is responsible for identifying trigger points with just over half of the respondents believing they have this responsibility (insinuating that the other half do not consider this to be the case). This is perhaps indicative of a breakdown in communication at some level. The responses to most of the statements indicate the FLMs realise a partnership approach is required whereby different groups of stakeholders have to work together. This is clearly in line with the best practice suggested by Dibben et al. (2001a). It was expected the 'HR Department' response category would have the highest frequency for many of the questions in line with past research (Renwick, 2003). However this is not reflected in Table 26 where there are only three instances of this; for example, 'monitoring absence levels across directorates'. Another surprising outcome is the high number of responses suggesting the Trade Unions had responsibility for managing aspects of absence such as 'managing long term absences'. This is not consistent with existing research carried out by authors such as CIPD (2007b).

The role of the line managers of the FLMs also appears to be more involved than previously considered with many of the statements having higher frequencies for their line manager than the HR department, for example in ensuring the absence policy is followed and managing long term absences.

Within Chapter Three, previous research by James et al. (2002); Hayday (2006) and Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) was shown (in Figure 19) to demonstrate the different types of roles of FLMs which are usually undertaken as part of their absence management duties. The results shown in Table 26 confirm that FLMs undertake a wide variety of these roles. This implies the role played by HR is less strong than hypothesised and strengthens the argument that organisations are devolving a large amount of 'HR work' to their FLMs (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995; Brewster and Larsen, 2000 and Bond and Wise, 2003).

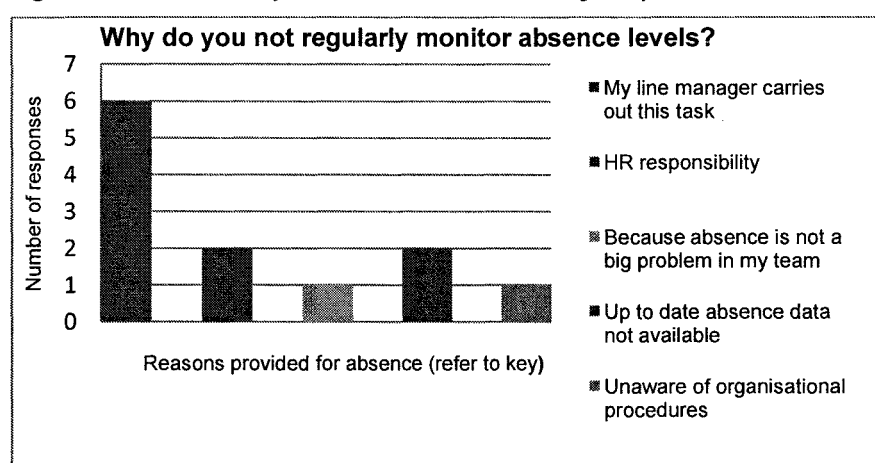
Respondents were asked a series of specific questions about whether they regularly carried out the absence management interventions required as part of the organisation's policy, with 95.5% of the respondents stating they do carry out return-to-work interviews with their team after every period of absence. This was an important question as Edwards and Whitson (1989) suggests that carrying out return-to-work interviews is an important part of managing absence and this is reflected by CIPD's (2008b) annual absence survey which reports that this is still the most frequently used intervention by organisations. However, this also raises an issue for the organisation, as despite the fact that they appear to be using this intervention, they still have higher than average levels of absence. Therefore an element of doubt exists over whether return-to-work interviews are an effective intervention. The reasons given for not carrying them out were; 'senior management responsibility' (one respondent) 'my line manager carries them out' (three respondents); and 'unaware of organisational policy' (one respondent). These results were unanticipated as respondents in previous case study research by Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) stated that lack of time and competing priorities were the main barriers.

A smaller number of respondents (71.9%) stated they did carry out a sickness counselling interview whenever an employee hits one of the organisational trigger points. As carrying out these type of interviews was not highlighted as common practice by previous researchers, it is not possible to benchmark this result, however it is noticeable that the result is significantly lower than was cited for carrying out return-to-work interviews. Those who stated they did not do this were asked why this was the case, and the majority (85%) stated it was because their own line manager had taken over this responsibility. Three other reasons were provided (all of which were only given by one respondent) and

they were; this is a senior management task; because absence is not a big problem in my team and because the situation (of hitting a trigger point) had never arisen. None of the respondents stated lack of time, knowledge or training as their reason which opposes the earlier results from Cunningham and Hyman (1995).

The number of respondents who stated they regularly monitored absence levels was slightly lower at 83.1%. The reasons for not performing this task are shown in Figure 61 which indicates it is mostly because other people have been allocated this responsibility. This is positive for the organisation as it suggests that the role is being carried out, there simply needs to be clearer confirmation of which layer of management has overall responsibility. Conversely if the work of Acas (2006) is considered, the organisation should encourage FLMS (rather than the other stakeholders) to monitor absence levels as this may lead to lower levels of absence.

Figure 61 Reasons why absence levels are not regularly monitored



Finally, on the subject of carrying out their line management responsibilities for managing absence, the respondents were asked if they felt there was anything preventing them from carrying out their duties and only 14.6% stated this was the case. This is a positive result from the organisation's perspective as it suggests over 80% feel the organisation is supporting their needs. This may also be considered to be a slightly unexpected result as the work of Cunningham and Hyman (1999) suggests that there are many barriers to prevent FLMS from carrying out their HR related duties.

The two most frequent issues shown in Table 27 are lateness in receiving data from HR and insufficient administrative support, which are commonly reported

problems (Cabinet Office, 2004) and are also quite practical in nature and could be resolved fairly easily via more effective organisation within the Council.

By 'additional staff cover' this has been interpreted to mean the FLMs have to spend time on arranging this cover which prevents them from completing other absence related duties, this links in with the response of 'insufficient time' and supports the earlier work of Harris (2005). It is interesting to note two types of policy issues have been identified; having an inflexible policy has been identified in past research as an issue (Hayday et al., 2007) but this has to be balanced against the need to treat all employees consistently (Bond and McCracken, 2005). Secondly there was a link to work-life balance policies which is an interesting related area which has previously been researched by White et al. (2003).

Table 27 Issues preventing FLMs from carrying out their absence management responsibilities

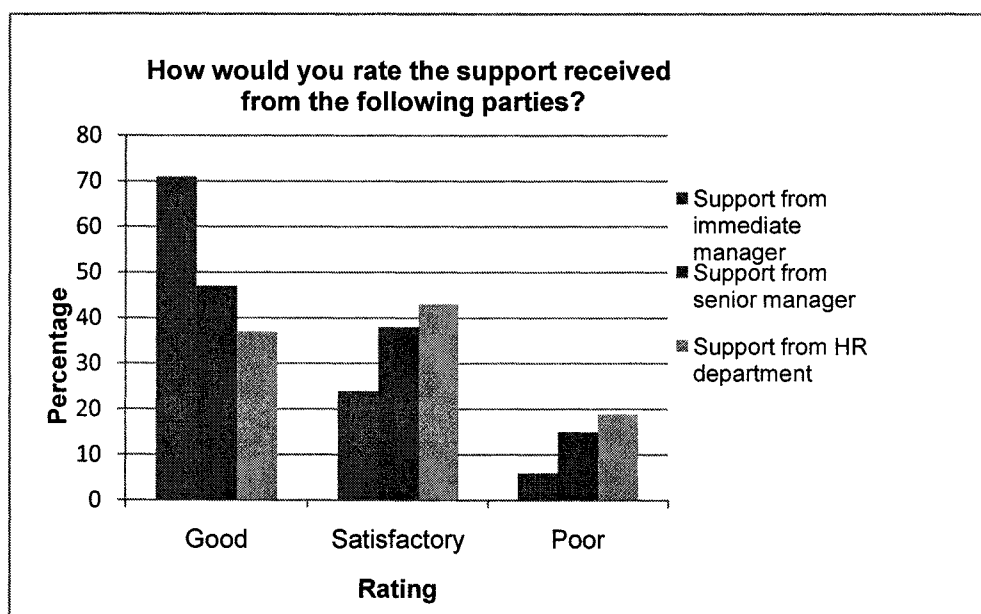
- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tardiness of receiving absence data from HR (27.3%)• Insufficient administrative support (18.2%)• Additional staff cover (18.2%)• Policy is too prescriptive and inflexible (9.1%)• Insufficient time (9.1%)• Ineffective range of work-life balance policies (9.1%) |
|---|

Support to FLMs from other stakeholders including HR professionals is an important part of the managing absence process (Larsen and Brewster, 2003). National Audit Office (2006) and Whittaker and Marchington (2003) emphasised the importance of senior management commitment. To test this, the next group of questions on the survey explored the levels of support the FLMs receive from different levels of the organisation.

The results shown in Figure 62 show the support received from immediate managers has been rated the most highly with 71% rating it as good. Ratings for the HR Department were the least positive with 43% rating it as satisfactory and 19% as poor. The low ratings for HR may be partly related to the fact that the FLMs usually only deal with them on complex cases and therefore their views may be influenced by these experiences. These results are broadly consistent with the work of Robson (2007b) who established within the Local Authorities based research that FLMs often have a poor perception of their HR colleagues.

Part of the suggested tension that sometimes occurs between HR and FLM is because HR believe that the FLMs are not knowledgeable enough (IPD, 1995; Cunningham and Hyman, 1995). This was confirmed in the findings of Dibben et al. (2001a) where HR research respondents identify occasions where they have had to step in to rectify situations where FLMs have made errors in the absence management process. There may also be an issue whereby there is ambiguity over who is responsible for carrying out certain absence management related tasks (Dibben et al., 2001a).

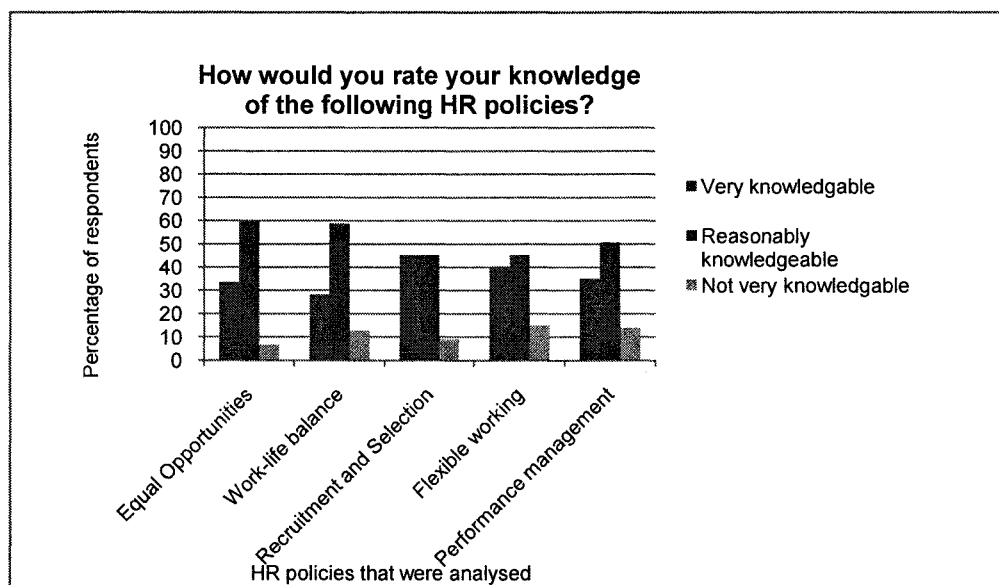
Figure 62 Ratings for levels of support received from internal stakeholders



There is a clear need for absence to be managed holistically in organisations (ANAO, 2003) so that the FLMs understand how it is linked to other people management policies and processes. To test this proposition the respondents to this survey were asked to rate their knowledge of a number of associated HR policies and procedures, followed by their confidence in being able to apply them.

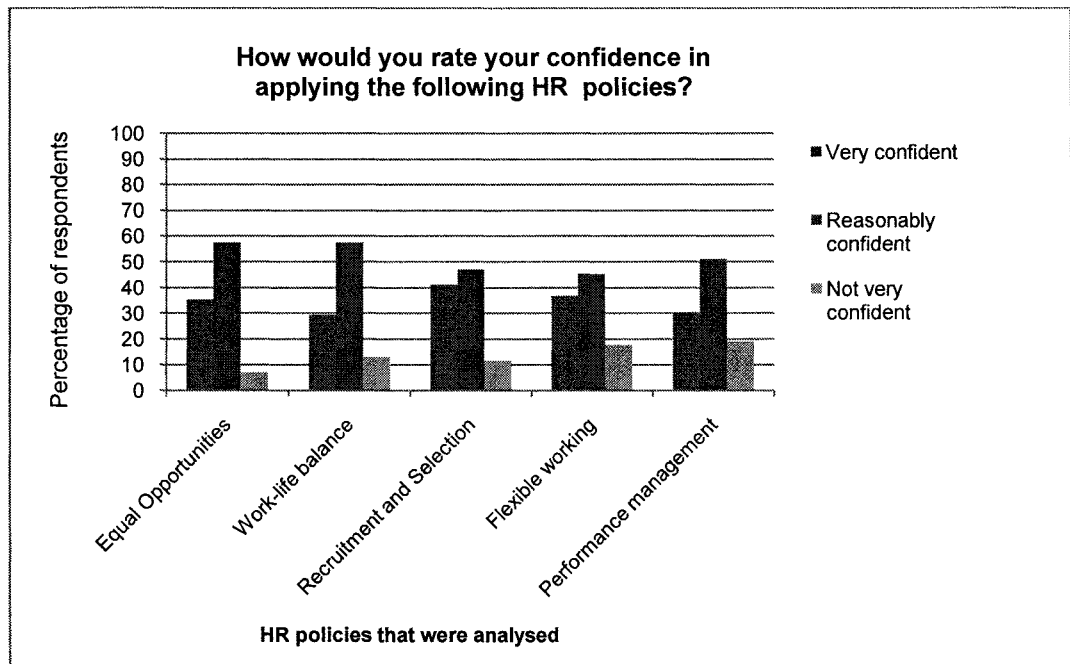
Figure 63 depicts how the respondents rated their own knowledge on the five selected HR policies. Broadly speaking, Figure 62 shows the majority of respondents selected the middle category of 'reasonably knowledgeable', with the Equal Opportunities and Work-life balance policies receiving the highest number of ratings of 'very knowledgeable'. Overall, the results are not consistent with the earlier work by James et al. (2002) who found evidence of a lack of awareness of wider HR policies in their research participants. This suggests that FLMs at GMBC have a higher appreciation of how absence sits holistically.

Figure 63 Self-rating of knowledge of HR policies



This was followed by asking the respondents to identify how confident they were in applying the same five policies, as shown in Figure 64. Again, the majority of respondents rated themselves as being reasonably confident in applying these policies, and as expected the profile is similar to their responses when asking about their knowledge. It is interesting to note the policy which scored the most highly as 'very confident' was recruitment and selection rather than the policies relating to arguably less tangible areas of people management.

Figure 64 Self-rating of confidence in applying HR policies



6.5.3. General work attitudes

The questionnaire asked a series of questions to gauge how the respondents felt about their role in the organisation and the job they carry out. As discussed in the research methods chapter this section contains a series of questions from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) by Mowday et al. (1979) and the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) by Spector (1985). Table 28 provides an overview of the frequency of responses.

Table 28 Responses to general work attitudes statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	MEAN	Agree	Disagree
I feel very little loyalty to this Council	14.6%	4.5%	16.9%	40.4%	23.6%	3.54	19.1%	64.0%
I find that my values and the Council's values are very similar	16.9%	41.6%	37.1%	4.5%	0%	2.29	58.5%	4.5%
I would accept almost any type of job assignment to continue working for this Council	11.2%	4.5%	22.5%	38.2%	23.6%	3.58	15.7%	61.8%
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this Council	33%	36.4%	27.3%	3.4%	0%	2.01	69.4%	3.4%
I could just as well be working for another Council as long as the type of work was similar	4.5%	34.8%	32.6%	24.7%	3.4%	2.88	39.3%	28.1%

Table 28 Responses to general work attitudes statements (continued)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	MEAN	Agree	Disagree
It would take very little change in my personal circumstances to cause me to leave this Council	4.5%	14.6%	19.1%	44.9%	16.9%	3.55	19.1%	61.8%
Often I find it difficult to agree with this Council's policies on employee matters	2.2%	12.4%	36%	43.8%	5.6%	3.38	14.6%	49.4%
Deciding to work for this Council was definitely a mistake on my part	2.2%	1.1%	6.7%	42.7%	47.2%	4.31	3.3%	89.9%
I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do	3.4%	40.2%	11.5%	25.3%	19.5%	3.17	43.6%	44.8%
My manager is quite competent in doing his/her work	15.7%	50.6%	24.7%	6.7%	2.2%	2.29	66.3%	8.9%
I like the people I work with	24.7%	68.5%	5.6%	1.1%	0%	1.83	93.2%	1.1%
There is really too little chance for promotion in my job	8%	42%	22.7%	23.9%	3.4%	2.73	50%	27.3%
When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should	1.1%	36%	30.3%	29.2%	3.4%	2.98	37.1%	32.6%
Communication seems good within this Council	2.3%	34.5%	29.9%	21.8%	11.5%	3.06	36.8%	33.3%
Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted	4.5%	34.8%	37.1%	19.1%	4.5%	2.84	39.3%	23.6%
My manager is unfair to me	3.4%	0%	16.1%	42.5%	37.9%	4.11	3.4%	80.4%
The goals of the Council are not clear to me	0%	5.7%	19.3%	68.2%	6.8%	3.76	5.7%	75%
I find I have to work harder at my job because of the incompetence of the people I work with	3.4%	22.5%	23.6%	41.6%	9%	3.3	25.9%	68.6%
I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated	5.6%	22.5%	34.8%	27%	10.1%	3.13	28.1%	37.1%

Consideration of the mean scores for each of the items in Table 28 suggests many of them are around 3, which is the middle category of neither agree or disagree. If this was temporarily removed it is possible to calculate a new set of scores showing either agreement or disagreement with the statements. These revised figures are provided in the end columns of Table 28 where it can be seen that the majority of positive statements received high positive scores and vice versa with the negative statements. It is interesting there are some very high scores on the agreement side such as 93.2% of the respondents state they like the people they work with; 75% disagreed the goals of the Council were not clear and 69.4% state they are proud to tell other people they work for Gateshead Council.

There are also a number of items where the percentage of respondents who agreed and disagreed with the statements were fairly similar, this may suggest different people or departments within the organisation have a different experience in their workplaces. This will be investigated further within the more detailed breakdown of results presented later in this chapter whereby results can be compared between divisions and departments. The results also identify some areas where improvements could be made, for example; only 66.3% agreed '*my manager is quite competent in doing his/her work*', which suggests some of the remaining third of FLMs may have issues needing to be resolved.

There may also be issues regarding the perceived opportunities for promotion within GMBC as 50% of respondents agreed with the statement '*there is really too little chance for promotion in my current job*' and if the organisation is not able to address this issue, they may find it hard to retain some of their FLMs. This could indirectly have an impact on managing absence, as new FLMs would need to be recruited and trained to carry out their absence management responsibilities. This may be an issue that the organisation need to address as Duffield et al (2001) established that there are now increased promotion opportunities for FLMs, therefore the FLMs from GMBC may have the opportunity to move to another organisation who has a clearer career path.

6.5.4. Your role as a manager at Gateshead Council

The survey instrument contained one open question and asked the respondents to provide four words they believed described their management style when managing the absence of their staff. To ensure objectivity the words were not initially grouped into themes and were all treated individually. In total, 51 words were provided (a full list is available as Appendix Eight). The ten most frequently cited words are shown below in Figure 65. It is interesting to note the vast majority of these words appear to be positive and consistent with descriptions of 'effective managers' in the HR literature such as the work by Grainger et al. (2004).

Figure 65 Words that respondents chose to describe their own management style

1. Fair	6. Honest
2. Helpful	7. Approachable
3. Supportive	8. Sympathetic
4. Understanding	9. Flexible
5. Firm	10. Open

The results shown in Figure 65 are important because they appear to oppose the findings of previous research by Renwick (2003) who suggests that FLMS are not always satisfied with having people management responsibilities. The use of positive words to describe their own management style insinuates that they do accept this responsibility and have adopted a particular management style.

The respondents were provided with a series of statements associated with general management styles for which they had to state how often they felt they engaged in these behaviours. The five point response scale ranged from *Always* (1) to *Never* (5). An overview of these results is shown below in Table 29. It is interesting to note most of the positive statements have a mean between 1 and 2 indicating the managers believe these actions are engaged in on a regular basis. When asked a question regarding their relationship with their immediate supervisors the scores were less positive with a mean of 2.46 implying they do not always get what they ask for from their superiors. Arguably this may suggest some potential tensions in the working relationship which is not desirable when trying to manage absence effectively.

Table 29 Responses to statements about management style

	Always	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Making my attitudes clear to the group	22.7%	63.6%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Putting suggestions made by the group into operation	11.4%	79.5%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Finding time to listen to group members	52.8%	46.1%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Criticising poor work	1.1%	13.6%	62.5%	22.7%	0.0%
Speaking in a manner not to be questioned	0.0%	4.5%	34.8%	36.0%	24.7%

Table 29 Responses to statements about management style (continued)

	Always	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Looking out for the personal welfare of individual group members	51.7%	43.8%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Keeping the group well informed	56.8%	40.9%	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Treating group members as if they were my equals	56.3%	36.8%	4.6%	2.3%	0.0%
Get what I ask for from my superiors	4.6%	50.6%	39.1%	5.7%	0.0%
Ask that group members follow standard rules and regulations	48.9%	39.8%	10.2%	1.1%	0.0%
Making group members feel at ease when I am talking to them	69.3%	29.5%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Letting group members know what is expected of them	53.4%	44.3%	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Maintaining definite standards of performance	48.9%	48.9%	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Refusing to explain my actions	0.0%	2.3%	5.7%	31.8%	60.2%

6.5.5. Perceptions of your role in absence management

The final section of the questionnaire (shown in Table 30) explored how the respondents perceive their role by asking them to rate their agreement with a series of statements on a scale of strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). The overall picture generated is that managers appear to be clear about their role and how they carry it out; for example, 84% of respondents agreed they were confident in applying the policy which is clearly a different view to the majority of the past studies carried out in this area (i.e. Dibben et al., 2001a; Hayday, 2006). In addition, the responses suggest the crucial area of working in partnership with other stakeholders is accepted and understood. This was an unanticipated result as the literature in this area suggests there can be ambiguities over roles and responsibilities in the managing absence process (Renwick, 2003; Robson, 2007b). Some of the items in this scale have been influenced by a large number of responses in the 'neither agree nor disagree' category which can make the interpretation of these initial responses more complicated. For example, at first sight just over half of the responses disagreed with the statement '*I do not always know how to deal with absence cases*' therefore logically it would be assumed the other half agreed with the statement, unfortunately over 30% chose the 'neither agree or disagree' option. Conversely, this may be an accurate representation of how the respondents felt about this statement, where they were genuinely unsure as to their response.

In terms of reported compliance with best practice interventions, there are some very positive results. Examples include 81.8% of respondents agreeing that managing absence was an important part of their daily routine. This is an intriguing result as IPD (1995) and Renwick (2003) suggests FLMs do not always accept absence management as one of their main responsibilities and Robson (2007b) suggests that where the responsibility is accepted, it is usually not seen as a priority. In addition, 85.3% of the respondents agreed senior management had communicated the importance of managing absence. This is a positive outcome for the organisation as Whittaker and Marchington (2003) is clear that commitment to managing absence has to be top-down and visible commitment from senior managers can make an impact on absence levels.

A number of challenges are also clearly identified including the fact that less than half of the respondents believed they had enough time in their normal working day to manage absence. This is consistent with the research findings of Hutchinson and Wood (1995).

Table 30 Responses to statements on managing absence

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	TOTAL AGREE	TOTAL DISAGREE
I feel confident in applying the absence policy when members of my team have been absent	42%	42%	5.7%	6.8%	3.4%	84%	10.2%
I have a clear understanding of the organisation's absence management policy	32.2%	36.8%	13.8%	14.9%	2.3%	69%	17.2%
I am unsure as to what role HR play in the managing absence process	3.4%	27.3%	25%	37.5%	6.8%	30.7%	44.3%
I am clear about which parts of absence management I am responsible for	42%	54.5%	3.4%	0%	0%	96.5%	0%
I do not always know how to deal with absence cases	1.2%	12.8%	30.2%	46.5%	9.3%	14%	55.8%
I have all the support I need to carry out my people management duties	10.2%	40.9%	17%	23.9%	8%	51.1%	31.9%
Absent employees are treated quite harshly by the Council's procedures	1.1%	14.8%	21.6%	40.9%	21.6%	15.9%	62.5%

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	TOTAL AGREE	TOTAL DISAGREE
All absences in my team are recorded on a daily basis	26.1%	43.2%	15.9%	12.5%	2.3%	69.3%	14.8%
Managing absence is an important part of my daily routine	30.7%	51.1%	13.6%	3.4%	1.1%	81.8%	4.5%
Senior managers have communicated the importance of managing absence to me	27.3%	58%	13.6%	1.1%	0%	85.3%	1.1%
I do not have enough time to be proactive in trying to reduce absence	9.1%	34.1%	25%	26.1%	5.7%	43.2%	31.8%
Line managers are not the best people to be in charge of managing absence	1.1%	12.5%	20.5%	45.5%	20.5%	13.6%	66%
I have enough time in my normal working day to manage absence	8%	37.5%	20.5%	27.3%	6.8%	45.5%	34.1%
My performance in managing absence is judged by my manager	21.6%	34.1%	26.1%	17%	1.1%	55.7%	18.1%

To summarise this initial univariate analysis, there is definitely evidence of good practice in absence management existing from the perspective of FLMS.

However, there are also some opportunities and areas for development for the organisation which may enable them to manage absence more 'effectively'.

6.6. Survey reliability

As there are four separate scales utilised within the questionnaire design, it was appropriate to calculate the Cronbach's alpha coefficient to measure their internal consistency. It is generally accepted that an alpha score of 0.70 or above is a good support for internal consistency reliability therefore this was the accepted level for this study (Morgan et al., 2004). Prior to carrying out these tests a number of items in each scale were recoded if they were a negative statement to ensure all of the statements were in the same direction. Failure to do this could have led to the responses of different statements cancelling each other out and miscalculating the alpha coefficient value.

The first scale (appearing in *Section D: General work attitudes* on the questionnaire) was used to measure job satisfaction level using eleven different items. This scale showed an alpha coefficient of 0.831. This was followed by the second scale which measures organisation commitment using eight questionnaire items. This scale showed a reliability coefficient of 0.817.

The third scale (appearing in *Section E: Your role as a manager at Gateshead Council* on the questionnaire) showed a reliability coefficient of 0.715 and the fourth scale (appearing in *Section F: Thinking about your role in managing absence* on the questionnaire) gave a coefficient value of 0.832. These coefficients are presented in Table 31.

Table 31 Reliability scores using Cronbach's alpha coefficient

	Cronbach alpha	Number of scale items
Reliability score for job satisfaction scale	0.831	11
Reliability score for organisation commitment scale	0.817	11
Reliability score for Section E	0.715	14
Reliability score for Section F	0.832	15

As Table 31 illustrates the scores for all four scales are higher than 0.70 it is reasonable to assume the level of internal consistency is acceptable as the closer the alpha is to 1.0 the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale and thus each group of statements used within the scales are related to one individual area of consideration (Gliem and Gliem, 2003).

This gives confidence that the results reported within this research can be interpreted meaningfully because the scales measure what they purport to measure. For example; this means it can be assumed the job satisfaction scale can provide us with a meaningful measure of how satisfied the respondents were. Having confidence in these results means that it is possible to state that any statistically significant associations can be used to identify the characteristics of FLMs required to manage absence effectively in the UK public sector.

6.7. Further investigation of the survey data

The key hypotheses for this study (as discussed within the research framework chapter) involved establishing whether associations exist between a number of given characteristics and the absence levels reported by the respondent. This section investigates each of the hypotheses (and sub-hypotheses) in turn and discusses whether or not they can either be accepted or rejected at a pre-determined level of statistical significance.

A reminder of the tests that have been used is presented within Table 32 which also shows which hypotheses the questions relate to, the type of data that the responses provide, and the tests that were used to analyse the data. This demonstrates that the questionnaire analysis was driven directly from the hypotheses rather than simply 'trawling' the data to identify associations between any of the variables. This approach is consistent with the research philosophy and methods used within this study. Table 32 also demonstrates which tests were used for each variable. These decisions were based on the nature and type of data that was provided by the questionnaire responses as discussed within the Research Framework chapter.

Table 32 Overview of statistical tests used to analyse survey data

Question No	Question(s)	Format of response category	Hypotheses Ref	Data analysis techniques
A1	Which area do you work in?	Two choices	2.1	Frequency table Mann-Whitney with levels of absence (B3)
A2	Which Department are you based in?	Choice of 11 Departments and one 'other' category	2.2	Frequency table Kruskal Wallis with attitude statements
A3	Please state which sub-department you are based in.	Open question	2.2	Frequency table Kruskal Wallis with attitude statements
A4	Please state how many years you have worked in your current role.	Open for them to add relevant number	1.3	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
A5.1	Have you previously worked in a non-management role at Gateshead Council?	Two choices – yes/no	1.6	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)
A5.2	If yes, did you work in the same Department that you do now?	Two choices – yes/no	1.6	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)
A6	Please state how many days absence you have had in the last year.	Open for them to add relevant number	1.5	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
A7	How many times have you been absent in the last year?	Open for them to add relevant number	1.5	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
B1	How many staff are you responsible for?	Open for them to add relevant number	2.3	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)

Table 32 Overview of statistical tests used to analyse survey data (continued)

Question No	Question(s)	Format of response category	Hypotheses Ref	Data analysis techniques
B2	Approx how many of these staff are part time?	Open for them to add relevant number	2.4	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
B3	Over the last year, what is the average number of days absence for your team?	Open for them to add relevant number	All hypotheses 1.1-5.3	Frequency table
C1	Please indicate who has responsibility for the following areas of absence management – followed by a list of 15 statements	Six response categories (You, your line manager, HR Department, Senior Managers, Trade Unions, Occ Health). Respondents can choose more than one response category and received a score.	4.1	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
C2.1	Do you carry out return-to-work interviews after every absence in your team?	Yes/No	5.3	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)
C2.2	If no, please give the main reason	Open question		Frequency table
C3.1	Do you carry out sickness counselling interviews whenever an employee hits a trigger point?	Yes/No	5.3	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)
C3.2	If no, please give the main reason.	Open question		Frequency table
C4.1	Do you regularly monitor the absence levels of your team?	Yes/No	5.3	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)

Table 32 Overview of statistical tests used to analyse survey data (continued)

Question No	Question(s)	Format of response category	Hypotheses Ref	Data analysis techniques
C4.2	If no, please give the main reason	Open question		Frequency table
C5.1	Are there any things which prevent you from carrying out your duties in relation to managing absence?	Yes/No	5.3	Frequency table Mann-Whitney (yes/no) with levels of absence (B3)
C5.2	If yes, please give details	Open question		Frequency table
C6	How would you rate the support you receive from the following parties in managing absence cases? (followed by three different groups – Your immediate manager, senior management and HR Department)	Three choices (good, satisfactory, poor)	3.5	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)
C7.1	How would you rate your knowledge of the following HR policies (list of five policies)	Three response categories (very knowledgeable, knowledgeable and not very knowledgeable)	4.3	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)
C7.2	How would you rate your confidence in applying the following HR policies (list of five policies)	Three response categories (very confident, confident and not very confident)	5.2	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)
D1	Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements (followed by nineteen statements)	Five items on a Likert scale (Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)	3.1 3.2	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)

Table 32 Overview of statistical tests used to analyse survey data (continued)

Question No	Question(s)	Format of response category	Hypotheses Ref	Data analysis techniques
E1	Please give four words that you think describe your management style when you are managing the absence of your staff.	Open question – asked to provide four words	3.4	Frequency table
E2	Thinking about your general management style, please indicate how often you think you engage in the following behaviours (followed by fourteen statements)	Five items on a Likert scale (Always, often, occasionally, seldom, never)	3.4	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)
F1	Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements (followed by fifteen statements)	Five items on a Likert scale (Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)	3.3 4.2 5.1	Frequency table Spearman with levels of absence (B3)
G1	What is your gender?	Two choices	1.1	Frequency table Mann-Whitney with levels of absence (B3)
G2	What is your age?	Open for them to add relevant number	1.2	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
G3	What is your total length of service?	Open for them to add relevant number	1.3	Frequency table Pearson with levels of absence (B3)
G4	Please indicate your current job grade	Six response categories including 'other'	1.4	Frequency table Kruskal Wallis to see if there are differences between the different pay grades

Whilst the variables with a statistically significant result are highlighted, the views of Morgan et al. (2004:89) have been considered to be important as they state “*statistical significance is not the same as practical significance or importance*”. Distinctions are therefore drawn between statistically significant and practically significant results, and some of the key non-significant results and their implications are discussed. In line with good practice, the direction and size of the associations will be reported alongside the associated levels of statistical significance as appropriate.

When analysing the responses to the questions, it became apparent the average absence levels reported were not consistent with the levels of absence reported by the organisation. In one case the respondent stated the average number of days absence per employee was 645 days over the last year. This is obviously an impossible figure as the absolute maximum could only be 365 days. A further eleven cases were considered to be inaccurate as they reported over 150 days per employee. It has been assumed when conducting this research that these twelve respondents had misread the question and had actually cited the total number of days lost to absence in their team. To ensure the use of accurate and meaningful data, the average number of days of absence was recalculated for the twelve cases by dividing the total number of days by the number of employees.

6.7.1. Hypothesis 1 – Association between personal characteristics and levels of absence

H_0 No association exists between the personal characteristics of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates.

H_1 An association does exist between the personal characteristics of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates.

6.7.1.1. Investigating differences between levels of absence and gender of FLMs

The data analysis shows the mean number of days of absence was higher for the female respondents (31.82 days) in comparison to the male respondents (28.25 days). However this was not at a statistically significant level ($p=0.51$) so we can assume there is no differences between levels of absence reported and the gender of the respondent. This indicates the null hypothesis should be accepted: *no differences exist between the levels of absence of subordinates based on the gender of their FLM.*

The results of this study appear to concur with the work of Hales (2005) who suggested there might be a link between gender of FLMS and absence levels of employees but was unable to provide an association at a level which was statistically significant. It is not possible to compare these results directly with the work of Moore et al. (2005) as the respondents in this survey were not asked to provide a gender breakdown of their team alongside the absence records for each employee. However, the over-arching finding from the work of Moore et al. (2005) which proposes "*there are some modest benefits [in relation to absence levels] associated with having a female supervisor*" is not consistent with the findings of this study where male FLMS report lower levels of absence of their subordinates.

If this variable had proven statistically significant in this study, organisations would have had to approach this issue carefully due to sex discrimination legislation, but this research suggests this debate is not required at present.

6.7.1.2. Investigating differences between levels of absence and age of FLMS

When analysing the data looking at the age of the respondents and their reported levels of absence revealed a statistically significant correlation ($r(66) = 0.33, p = 0.006$). As the correlation is positive this means older FLMS are generally associated with having higher reported levels of absence within their team. This result means we can reject the null hypothesis at the 1% level of no association and state there is a difference between the age of FLMS and levels of absence of their team. The actual strength of the difference may be classed as low to medium (Cohen, 1988) which was to be expected when dealing with a relatively small sample size. Although this difference has the potential to be practically significant as well as being statistically significant, organisations would need to be mindful of discriminating on the grounds of age within their provision. In relation to the research question; the age of FLMS can be used as a variable to predict their effectiveness in managing absence.

6.7.1.3. Investigating associations between levels of absence and length of service of FLMs

Studying the data at a descriptive level showed support for the findings of the study by Garcia (1987) which established the longer an employee worked at the organisation, the lower their personal absence levels were. However, when looking for a statistically significant association, the direction of the correlation between these two variables was positive in direction but not at a statistically significant level ($r(65) = 0.09$, $p=0.426$) and means we can accept the null hypothesis: *no association exists between the FLMs' length of service and the frequency of absence of their subordinates*. This suggests levels of absence of the corresponding subordinates cannot be predicted from knowing the length of service of the FLM. This calculation may be affected by the mean length of service for this group of FLMs which is quite high and this group of employees (FLMs) tend to be different from employees in other layers of the organisation i.e. employees with no subordinates, or managers at middle or senior levels.

It is important GMBC take a sensible approach to support and develop the FLMs to ensure new managers receive additional support and also do not assume that FLMs with long lengths of service do not require additional training or support. Accordingly, the work of Cunningham and Hyman (1999) should receive careful consideration as they believe that FLMs should participate in training on a regular basis; particularly if there have been changes to the system. The findings of Robson (2007b) would also seem to be relevant in this instance, whereby the training should be designed to meet the specific needs of the participants and if possible, FLMs should be involved in the design of the training (Lawler and Hackman, 1969).

6.7.1.4. Investigating associations between levels of absence and job grade of FLMs

Respondents selected their job grade from the list of five provided by the organisation, which also highlighted the wide span of roles and responsibilities encompassed under the job role of being a FLM. The results show there are differences between the five groups but there is not a statistically significant association ($r_s(62) = -0.12$, $p=0.33$). This allows the acceptance of the null hypothesis: *no association exists between the job grade of FLMs and levels of absence of their employees*.

This result suggests there are no specific groups where the organisation should prioritise their absence management interventions. This difference in job grade is also likely to correspond with a difference in the number and levels of tasks and responsibilities held by the FLMs. This could have an indirect impact on the time they have available to spend on carrying out their absence management duties. As the results were not statistically significant, this suggests it would not be worthwhile for the organisation to differentiate resources between different levels of FLMs.

6.7.1.5. Investigating associations between the levels of absence and the personal absence record of the FLMs

As discussed within the literature review and research methods chapters there are two main ways to measure absence; total number of days and frequency of absences. In line with this, data on the personal absence levels of the FLMs was requested for both of these categories and they have both been used in order to test Hypothesis 1.5.

With regards to the levels of total absence (total number of days of absence) the direction of the correlation was negative but the association between the two variables was not statistically significant ($r(66) = -0.065$, $p = 0.6$). The negative direction of the association is interesting as it implies that as the personal absence level of the FLMs decrease, employee absence levels increase. The second measure of personal absence investigated the association between the absence levels of their team and their own frequency of absence (i.e. the number of separate occasions they had they been absent in the last year). On this occasion the correlation was positive but was not at a statistically significant level, ($r(66) = 0.067$, $p = 0.58$). Overall, the level of absence of the subordinate is independent of the absence level of their corresponding FLM. From investigating these two measures of the personal levels of absence of the FLMS we can accept the null hypothesis: *no association exists between the personal absence record of the FLM, and the levels of absence of their subordinates*. This suggests levels of absence cannot be predicted from knowing the levels of personal absence reported by the FLMs, thereby suggesting that if an absence culture does exist as described by Bevan (2003) and Johns and Patton (2007) then it seems as if the FLMs are outside of this.

6.7.1.6. Investigating associations between levels of absence and the career history of FLMs

To investigate the links between the career history of the FLMs and levels of absence, the respondents were simply asked to state whether or not they had previously worked in a non-management role in the organisation. The mean ranks between the groups were fairly close with the mean rank of those stating 'yes' being 33.66 compared to those stating 'no' being 34.74. The t was not statistically significant ($p=0.834$) which means we can accept the null hypothesis: *there is no association between the length of service of FLMs and the levels of absence in their team*. This needs to be considered within the context of the organisation which has a higher than usual percentage of FLMs who previously worked in a non-management role. Whilst no statistically significant association was uncovered, this remains an interesting area for future studies as this issue does not appear to have been investigated.

6.7.1.7. Summary of Hypothesis 1

The discussion provided above shows mixed results when looking for significant associations between the personal characteristics of the respondents and the levels of absence for their team. Overall, the null hypothesis can be accepted: *no association exists in the absence levels of subordinates depending on the personal characteristics of their FLM*. However, it is acknowledged the variable of age was statistically significant which means the organisation could consider the impact of age, perhaps by researching it in more detail. Therefore, in response to the research question; the age of FLMs can be used to provide an explanation of levels of absence of their subordinates. This moves the theory base forward as no existing research has investigated the variables in this way.

6.7.2. Hypothesis 2 – Association between organisational characteristics and levels of absence

- | | |
|-------|--|
| H_0 | No association exists between the organisational characteristics in which the FLMs work and the levels of absence of their subordinates. |
| H_1 | An association does exist between the organisational characteristics in which the FLMs work and the levels of absence of their subordinates. |

6.7.2.1. Division

It was important to look at Divisional level because they had been specifically chosen as the units of analysis because they were the best and worst performing departments within GMBC according to their absence data. As there was a large gap between average levels of absence it was hypothesised there would be a significant difference in the responses of the FLMs in these departments with regards to their average levels of absence.

The results show the mean number of days of absence was significantly higher in Community Based Services (36.68) days in comparison to Central Services (11.07 days). In this instance the difference is statistically significant ($p=0.01$) at the 1% level so we can assume there is a difference in absence levels in various divisions. This calculation confirms the Division in which the FLMs work has a relationship with the levels of absence of their subordinates, but obviously does not explain why this might be the case as supplementary qualitative information was not collected. Whilst it could be argued that this was an expected result because the two Divisions had specifically been chosen because of their absence levels, it is important to report this result as it demonstrates that this remained the case with the respondents to the survey. Perhaps this result can also potentially provide reassurance to the fact that the FLMs provided reasonably accurate absence data for their team. Finally, as part of a positivist study it remains prudent to report all of the data, even where the results appear to confirm information that was previously known from other sources.

6.7.2.2. Department

Ten Departments were identified to include all of the FLMs employed within the two Divisions in which this research is based; this allows comparisons to be made at a more local level. The data analysis shows there is a significant difference between absence levels reported from across the ten Departments and it is a statistically significant difference ($p=0.02$) at the 5% level. This allows us to reject the null hypothesis: *there is no difference between the Department in which the FLMs work and the levels of absence of their employees.*

Prior to conducting the data analysis, it could be predicted that looking at the variable of Department would have an association with levels of absence due to the fact that polar ends of the organisation were looked at e.g. best and worst performing in terms of average levels of absence. However, it remains worthy to note that the questionnaires completed by FLMs proved that this was the case and therefore the research results should be reported. An implication of this result may be that the organisation could consider adapting their absence management provision/support to fit the needs of different departments.

These figures can also be triangulated with the absence data for the same one year period, which also gives us an insight into how accurate the estimates of average levels of absence were from the respondents. This will provide an interesting finding as earlier research by Robson (2007b) found FLMs frequently underestimated the average levels of absence for their departments, and in some cases this led to the issue not receiving sufficient priority for improvement.

6.7.2.3. Total number of employees

Although there is only a small amount of empirical evidence which has looked at the span of control of the FLMs, there is that evidence larger organisations have higher levels of absence (Durand, 1985). Smulders (1983) is one of the small group of researchers who investigated this variable and demonstrated managers with large teams tended to have higher average levels of absence. This justified the inclusion of this variable as a hypothesis. On this occasion, the correlation was weakly positive but was not at a statistically significant level ($r(66) = 0.06$, $p = 0.61$). This implies that the organisation cannot predict absence levels by looking at the size of the span of the control and should not assume FLMs with larger groups of employees will have higher levels of absence (or vice versa). However, this does not mean GMBC should not pay attention to the size of teams within departments. FLMs with a large number of subordinates will require additional time allocated to absence management to allow them to carry out all of the required return-to-work interviews and other interventions. Additional support and guidance may also be required from HR and senior management to ensure the FLM has sufficient resources. This is particularly important for the survey respondents who stated they had in excess of 20 employees to line manage.

Peach Martins (2007) suggests that HR tasks (including managing absence) should be included within the job description of FLMs to reflect that it is an important element of their role. An indication of how much time might be needed to address this strategic issue may also prove useful in sending this message to FLMs. There may also be issues surrounding whether the FLMs in large departments have sufficient times to carry out potentially a very large number of return-to-work interviews.

6.7.2.4. Number of part time employees

As the existing body of literature in the area of absence suggests part time workers have higher levels of absence than their full time equivalents (Tuffin, 2001), the data were explored further to investigate whether there was a correlation between the number of part time staff managed by each FLM and the levels of absence for their team.

The results of this calculation demonstrate a very weak positive correlation which is not at a statistically significant level ($r(65) = 0.08, p = 0.5$). This means FLMs with a large percentage of part-time workers will not necessarily have to deal with higher levels of absence, which is the opposite of the expected result. Nevertheless, this does not imply managing the absences of part-time employees should not receive any attention from the organisation. There are often widespread problems in measuring the absence of part-time employees (Acas, 2006) where a clear policy does not exist of how they should be calculated, though advice is provided in the work of National Audit Office (2006). For example, only counting the days the employee was scheduled to attend work and allowing them to report they would have been fit to return on a non-scheduled work day. FLMs can also face challenges when conducting return-to-work interviews with employees unless they keep a close focus on exactly when (and at what time) the employee returns to work.

6.7.2.5. Summary of Hypothesis 2

The sub-hypotheses which have been considered in this section have shown mixed results in terms of identifying variables with which there is statistical significance. In line with the organisation's absence data, it can be seen there is a strong (and statistically significant difference) between both the Division and Department in which the FLMs work and the levels of reported absence.

The reasons behind this have been discussed within Chapter Two where contextual and environmental explanations were offered. The number and type of employees managed by the FLMs did not show any statistically significant results which means we cannot completely reject the overriding null hypothesis of *no association exists between the organisational characteristics in which the FLMs work and the levels of absence of their subordinates*. In other words, organisational characteristics (in which the FLMs work) do to some extent influence the levels of subordinate absence reported and is therefore another characteristic which contributes to the field by suggesting that it may influence absence levels.

6.7.3. Hypothesis 3 – Association between general work attitudes and levels of absence

- | | |
|-------|---|
| H_0 | No association exists between the general work attitudes of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates. |
| H_1 | An association does exist between the general work attitudes of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates. |

6.7.3.1. Job satisfaction

As discussed within the extant research, the concept of links between job satisfaction and absenteeism is complicated with a series of studies with contradictory findings (Farrell and Stamm, 1988). However, there is enough literature within the field to suggest this is an important variable, particularly when considering the work of Hackett and Guion (1985) and Goldberg (2000). To gauge how satisfied the respondents were, a series of eleven statements were used from Spector's (1994) Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) questionnaire and were correlated with the reported levels of absence. Surprisingly there were no statistically significant correlations between any of the statements relating to FLMs' job satisfaction and absence levels of their subordinates. This result is perhaps not totally unexpected, given the general inconsistency in the findings of previous studies in this area, whereby an association was identified in the work of Muchinsky (1977) whilst the work of Chadwick-Jones et al. (1982) was unable to establish any correlations between the two variables. However, despite the contradictory findings from previous studies the researcher did expect to uncover an association between the two variables.

The implication of this result is that an employee's absence will not be affected by how satisfied their FLM is with their own job. However, this does not imply that the job satisfaction of FLMs is not important. On a practical level, it would appear to be unrealistic to state job satisfaction definitely does not have an impact on levels of absence, and it should be accepted that these results are broadly in line with the general inconsistency of findings into job satisfaction and absence. This study also accepts the opinion of Mowday et al. (1982) who believe job satisfaction is an intermediary variable between leadership style and absenteeism, though further research would need to be carried out at GMBC to explore this specifically.

6.7.3.2. Organisation commitment

Eight statements on organisation commitment adapted from Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) featured on the survey to calculate the levels of organisation commitment of the FLMs. Only one of these statements produced a statistically significant association with levels of absence of the associated subordinates. This was for the statement '*I feel very little loyalty to this Council*' where the result was $r_s(66) = -0.244$, $p=0.045$. The direction of the association is negative and the correlation has a fairly small effect size (Cohen, 1988). If this statement on its own was a reliable measure of organisation commitment, the null hypothesis could be objectively rejected as there does appear to be an association between the two variables. Overall, with only one of the eight statements providing an association with commitment levels of the FLMs, it can be concluded that there is no significant association with the absence level of their subordinates. This lack of association between the two variables does not mean that organisations should not pay any attention to the levels of organisation commitment of the FLMs as this could have negative consequences. Looking specifically at absence management, if organisations do not seek to develop and improve the commitment of their FLMs this could potentially lead to poorer or inconsistent application of absence policies (Deery et al., 1995).

6.7.3.3. Acceptance of people management responsibilities

Four questions within the survey focused on whether the FLMs accepted they had responsibility for dealing with people management (HR) issues as the literature suggested FLMs typically believe the HR Department should be in charge of such issues. Dunn and Wilkinson (2002:238) believe:

More often than not, the management of absence was a case of 'pass the baton', as managers sought to involve personnel and vice versa.

On this occasion, no statistically significant results were found, though it is interesting to note the response to the statement '*Line managers are not the best people to be in charge of managing absence*' where the results were $r_s(65) = -0.22$, $p=0.07$, although the result is not quite significant at the 5% level, so the null hypothesis can be rejected. The negative association has potentially high practical significance. It is of practical significance because organisations can offer specific support to address these issues as they are within their control; this is not the case for other variables such as those related to demographics.

6.7.3.4. Management style

As Johnson et al. (2003) focused on management style, Section E of the survey asked the respondents to consider their own management style by answering fourteen statements about how often they engaged in the set of behaviours. The results did not provide any statistically significant associations and it is therefore necessary to accept the null hypothesis: *no association exists between management style and levels of absence*. This was an unexpected result as Johnson et al.'s (2003) earlier research suggested that there was an association between the management style of managers and the levels of absence of their subordinates. Management style was considered to be an important variable as it is one of the few that in the past has shown a relationship, either directly or indirectly. The lack of relationship within the current study may imply that the characteristics of FLMs are not associated with the levels of absence of their subordinates. At the same time, this lack of association could be attributable to the relatively small sample size. If the questionnaire was replicated across a number of organisations (with higher populations), the results may be different.

6.7.3.5. Support from stakeholders

The FLM respondents were asked to rate the support they received from other key stakeholders; their immediate managers ($r_s(66) = -0.006, p=0.96$); senior management ($r_s(63) = -0.12, p=0.92$) and the HR Department ($r_s(59) = -0.52, p=0.69$). It was interesting to note none of the associations were statistically significant, nor were they close to being so. The null hypothesis has to be accepted: support from other organisational stakeholders does not have an association with the perceived levels of absence. This was a surprising result as the work of IPD (1995) suggests the issue of support can have an impact on the extent to which absence is managed and a potential impact on levels of absence.

The present study has provided the opposite response to what was expected in relation to support from stakeholders. Whilst the relationship between FLMs and senior management is deemed to be important within the work of Dibben et al. (2001c) this has not been reinforced within the current study. Similarly the work of Larsen and Brewster (1993) argued that HR has a significant role to play in supporting the role of FLMs throughout all of their HR tasks, which would include absence management. However, it should be remembered that the univariate analysis that was carried out in this area, did highlight that FLMs had a less positive perception of FLMs, and therefore it would seem valuable for the organisation to focus on improving this working relationship.

6.7.3.6. Summary of Hypothesis 3

When considering the existing literature, it was surprising that only one element of organisation commitment showed a statistically significant association with levels of absence whilst the other four sub-hypotheses did not indicate any significant associations exist. This means the overall null hypothesis should be accepted: *no association exists between the general work attitudes of the FLMs with responsibility for managing employee absence and levels of absence of the subordinates*. Initial conclusions arising from this section of the research suggests that whilst this is an area organisations can influence, their interventions may not lead to a decrease in the levels of reported absence for associated staff. This suggests that the characteristics of job satisfaction, organisation commitment, acceptance of people management responsibilities,

management style and support received from other stakeholders are not required characteristics in order for FLMs to be able to manage absence effectively.

Whilst there has been little in the way of statistically significant findings here, this does not mean the organisation should not pay attention to the variables that have been investigated. There are wider benefits associated with many of these factors which relate to areas such as recruitment, retention and performance management. It is also likely there could be an indirect benefit on levels of absence, even if this cannot be statistically proven. For example, if FLMs have high levels of job satisfaction they are likely to take more pride in their work and be more diligent in following organisational policies and procedures.

In relation to absence management, FLMs are more likely to make sure all return-to-work interviews are carried out and see the wider benefits of them actively trying to manage absence. If FLMs can maintain or improve the absence levels of their employees, productivity is likely to be higher (Howarth, 2005), and there may be a higher level of customer service and/or profitability. A similar argument could be put forward for levels of employee commitment in terms of direct and indirect benefits to the organisation of having a team of highly committed FLMs. In particular they would hope to be able to retain effective managers, rather than lose them to neighbouring authorities who are likely to be able to offer similar work at a similar rate of pay.

As GMBC have adopted an approach whereby FLMs have specific people management responsibilities, it is essential they provide sufficient support to enable them to carry out the full range of their duties (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995). This involves making sure they are clear what the duties are and identifying where support may be needed from HR. This can be further reinforced by professionalising their role so their job descriptions and performance management criteria recognise their accountability in these areas as advocated by McGovern et al. (1997). As many of the FLMs are unlikely to have previous management or HR experience (Arroba and Wedgwood-Oppenheim, 1994), they will require support from a range of stakeholders including HR, and senior managers. In addition, parties such as Occupational

Health practitioners should provide support to the FLMs to enable them to carry out the processes fairly and consistently.

6.7.4. Hypothesis 4 – Association between knowledge of absence and associated HR policies and levels of absence

- | | |
|-------|--|
| H_0 | No association exists between how knowledgeable FLMs are in relation to absence and the levels of absence of their subordinates. |
| H_1 | An association does exist between how knowledgeable FLMs are in relation to absence and the levels of absence of their subordinates. |

6.7.4.1. Knowledge of absence management policies and procedures

Knowledge of the absence management policy and procedures was tested by ascertaining the extent to which the FLMs had clarity in the distribution of tasks involved in absence management. The importance of this in relation to effective absence management was emphasised strongly by Dibben et al. (2001a).

To try to measure this as accurately as possible, respondents were provided with a series of fifteen tasks that have to be carried out according to the organisation's absence management policy, respondents then had to stipulate which stakeholder(s) they felt had responsibility for each area. This was partially in recognition of the work of Bennett (2002) who found that his FLM respondents stated that they had a good knowledge of their absence policy, but were unable to demonstrate it. The correct responses were identified by analysing the organisational absence policy and procedures and verifying this with one of the key informants to ensure accurate information was used to generate scores. The responses to the statements were scored by awarding one correct point for each correct answer and subtracting one point where an incorrect response was also provided. Negative scoring was not employed so zero was the lowest possible score for each item.

The maximum points available for each statement are shown in Table 33 which means the maximum overall score for each respondent was 47. The scores for each respondent were then correlated with their reported absence level to establish whether an association existed between the two sets of data.

Table 33 Maximum scores for statements

Statement number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Maximum score	6	2	5	2	3	2	1	2	2	3	3	6	6	2	2

The results show there is a statistically significant association between the two variables $r(66) = -0.241$, $p = 0.048$. The direction of the correlation is negative which signifies a high score is associated with lower levels of absence. The effect size of the correlation can be described as being small (Cohen, 1988). As well as being statistically significant, the large amount of literature in this area suggests this finding is also of strong practical relevance to organisations. This is because the literature is clear about the importance of managers having a clear understanding of the absence policy (Hayday, 2006) and clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders (Dibben et al., 2001b). This is an interesting outcome for the research because of the way the knowledge of the FLMs was tested; using a series of statements which required correct answers, rather than simply asking them to self-evaluate their own knowledge in this area; this should provide additional confidence in the results that were obtained. This research finding implies that a key characteristics required for FLMs to manage absence effectively is to have a good knowledge of the organisation's absence policy,

This research finding is also of high practical significance to the organisation because it is a variable potentially within their control. It is likely they already have at least partial resources within the organisation that could be used to design and deliver appropriate support for the FLMs to enhance their levels of existing knowledge. GMBC can also use the findings from this research to identify the specific areas where FLMs were unable to provide the correct answer. For example; who is responsible for '*ensuring that all employees are familiar with the council's policy?*'

6.7.4.2. Knowledge of associated HR policies and procedures

A central argument presented in the literature review chapter was that effective absence management needs to be part of a holistic HR process (McHugh, 2001) and an integral feature of associated HR policies and practices (ANAO,

2003). In line with this, the respondents were asked to rate their levels of knowledge of five associated HR policies to see if there was an association between their levels of knowledge and levels of absence.

No significant results were found for the Equal Opportunities policy ($r_s(66) = 0.12, p=0.33$); Work-life balance policy ($r_s(62) = 0.16, p=0.22$); Recruitment and selection policy ($r_s(65) = 0.22, p=0.08$); Flexible working policy ($r_s(63) = 0.11, p=0.54$) or the Performance management policy ($r_s(62) = 0.79, p=0.54$). As none of the associations are statistically significant, the overarching null hypothesis has to be accepted as there appears to be no association between knowledge of HR policies of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates. Despite this result, the work of Bond and Wise (2003) must be considered as they stress the importance of FLMs understanding the integration needed between the absence management policy alongside wider HR policies.

When considering the results of this hypothesis, it is necessary to highlight the reliance on only asking one question about their self-perception of their own knowledge. The alternative would have been to compose an instrument such as the one used to test hypothesis 4.2 to actually test whether their knowledge is accurate and in line with the policy requirements. This was not possible in this instance due to the space constraints of a paper-based survey. Secondly there is potentially bias in the responses due to two issues a) the respondents answering truthfully and b) the respondents having an accurate self-perception of their own knowledge. For example, they may believe they have a good knowledge of a policy but in reality this is not correct.

6.7.4.3. Summary of Hypothesis 4

In terms of knowledge, it appears it is the explicit absence management policy and procedures that are the most important and this is substantiated by the statistically significant correlation identified in Hypothesis 4.1. However, organisations might argue even without the statistically significant associations between knowledge of related HR policies by the FLMs and levels of absence of the employees, this area remains practically important. Due to the strength of the extant research which was evaluated in Chapter Three, it is proposed that 'knowledge of related HR policies' remains a desirable outcome for organisations.

6.7.5. Hypothesis 5 – Attitudes towards absence and associated HR policies and level

- | | |
|-------|--|
| H_0 | No association exists between the attitudes towards absence of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates. |
| H_1 | An association does exist between the attitudes towards absence of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates. |

6.7.5.1. Attitudes towards managing absence

The purpose of this section of the questionnaire was to test some specific issues discussed within the literature. An example of this is whether the respondents empathise with absent employees and believe the organisation's absence management policy treats them quite harshly. In this instance, a statistically significant association was found at the 5% level ($r_s(65) = -0.250$, $p=0.41$). The direction of the association is negative and of relatively weak strength.

As the importance of senior management commitment has been emphasised strongly throughout the literature (Bennett, 2002 and McHugh, 2002) the respondents were asked to rank the statement '*Senior Managers have communicated the importance of managing absence to me*'. The results were $r_s(65) = 0.46$, $p=0.71$ which shows the association is not statistically significant, and therefore knowledge of this information cannot be used to predict levels of absence within the context of the case organisation.

6.7.5.2. Confidence in carrying out their role in absence management

Although knowledge of the policy is recognised as being crucial (McHugh, 2001) it is also essential the FLMs have the confidence to carry out their role (Hayday, 2007). The respondents were asked a direct question about their confidence in carrying out their role in absence management, separately from asking them to rate their knowledge. The result was not statistically significant ($r_s(65) = 0.17$, $p=0.16$) and therefore the null hypothesis was accepted. However, there was only one question on confidence included in the survey and therefore this may not be a true representation of the confidence levels possessed by the FLMs. The respondents may have also felt uncomfortable about identifying a lack of confidence (Butterfield et al., 2005) and therefore confidence may remain an issue.

Based on this result, confidence in carrying out their role in absence management is not a characteristic required by FLMS to manage absence effectively. However as Hayday (2007) and National Audit Office (2004b) believe that confidence is necessary, it would seem prudent for organisations to ensure that training programmes have an emphasis on increasing confidence as well as knowledge and skills in the managing absence process.

6.7.5.3. Confidence in applying related HR policies and procedures

As the importance of FLMS having confidence in managing absence was established, it seems appropriate this would also be the case when applying associated HR policies as part of the holistic approach that has been advocated throughout this thesis (as reflected in the work of McHugh, 2002 and Bennett, 2002 as well as Cabinet Office, 2004). After the respondents were asked to rate their own knowledge of related HR policies and procedures they were also asked to self-rate their confidence in applying the five stated policies. The results show no statistically significant correlations between reported confidence levels for any of the five policies by the targeted FLMS and the levels of absence of the associated subordinates. The actual results for each policy were: Equal Opportunities ($r_s(66) = 0.13, p=0.32$); Work-life balance ($r_s(62) = 0.19, p=0.12$); Recruitment and selection ($r_s(62) = 0.18, p=0.16$); Flexible working ($r_s(61) = 0.13, p=0.31$) and Performance management ($r_s(61) = 0.70, p=0.59$). We can therefore accept the null hypothesis.

The results indicate FLMS do not require additional support in order to be able to increase their confidence, however this should still be provided even though it may not result in a reduction in levels of absence of their subordinates. One of the reasons why this is important is that we know that many FLMS are promoted to their role because of their technical expertise (Arroba and Wedgwood-Oppenheim, 1994) and they may not have received HR training (Butterfield et al., 2005). Therefore as absence is a complex phenomenon to manage (Johnson et al., 2003) FLMS may lack the confidence in implementing the policies if they are unhappy with their perceived levels of skills and knowledge (Hayday, 2008).

6.7.5.4. Conscientiousness in applying absence management policies and procedures

The concept of conscientiousness is important because a criticism of FLMs in past research has been that FLMs have often used a common sense approach rather than following agreed procedures (Bond and McCracken, 2005). When considering conscientiousness in applying policies and procedures, one relevant measure is looking at compliance with the tasks FLMs are required to carry out (in line with GMBC's policy and procedures). The importance of carrying out return-to-work interviews is consistent through the academic literature (Bevan et al., 2004 and Hayday, 2006) as well as practitioner focused resources (Acas, 2006 and CIPD, 2007b).

Out of the four statements, the responses to one produced a statistically significant result and this was to the statement '*I have enough time in my normal working day to manage absence*'. The results were $r_s(65) = 0.265$, $p=0.03$ which indicates a weak to moderate positive correlation and is significant at the 5% level. This is an important aspect as previous work by Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) suggests that managing absence is often an added responsibility for FLMs on top of their 'normal' jobs and is not always reflected in workload (James et al. 2002). For example; if managing absence is a new responsibility for FLMs, it is unlikely that another responsibility will be removed from them to make way for it.

Hutchinson and Wood (1995) confirm that many FLMs struggle to carry out their absence management duties because of other tasks and commitments. It is also noted a related statement had very different conclusions; '*Managing absence is an important part of my daily routine*' shows a weak positive correlation: $r_s(65) = 0.16$, $p=0.9$ where the association is not statistically significant. The work of Cunningham and Hyman (1995 and 1999) is also relevant as they believe that lack of time to manage absence effectively can be a source of frustration for FLMs. This implies that not all FLMs see it as an inconvenience, as they can benefit from the advantages gained by the effective management.

It can also be observed that the other two statements in this category both produced negative correlations and although they did not prove to be statistically significant they are worthy of note: *All absences in my team are recorded on a daily basis* ($r_s(65) = -0.003, p=0.98$) and *I do not have enough time to be proactive in trying to reduce absence* ($r_s(65) = -0.150, p=0.22$). The responses to the question on recording absence on a daily basis were slightly surprising as the work of Johnson et al. (2003) suggests that the recording of absences is critical in effective absence management. The work of Winkler (1980) and Acas (2006) also confirms that where managers are seen to actively manage absence by recording all absences can act as a deterrent. As only one statement out of four produced a statistically significant result, this means the overarching null hypothesis should be accepted: *there is no association between the two variables in terms of FLMs and the levels of absence of the associated employees*. Therefore, conscientiousness is not one of the key characteristics required by FLMs to manage absence effectively.

6.7.5.5. Summary of Hypothesis 5

None of the overall sub-hypotheses which were explored were able to reject the null hypothesis as few statistically significant results were identified. However, a small number of statements did show practically important findings such as the need for the FLMs to have sufficient time to manage absence as well as having additional time to invest in more proactive absence reduction initiatives.

6.8. Limitations of the survey analysis

Although the response rate was lower than anticipated, it was still at an acceptable level to be able to carry out the required statistical tests. However, the small sample size does provide some restrictions on the power to generalise the findings. It would therefore not be appropriate to suggest the results and findings could definitely be generalised across other UK organisations, though it is likely they could be generalised with other Local Authorities which share similar characteristics and operate in a comparable environment. Although there were three questions which had a response rate of 19.1% or over, this was not deemed to be a serious limitation because of the nature of the topics covered in these three questions, whereby conclusions could still be drawn from their omission.

As with all surveys, the length of the document had to be considered and therefore some potentially useful variables had to be excluded, however the final version was sufficient to test the five key hypotheses. Similarly, it was necessary to adapt versions of scales to measure the concepts of job satisfaction and organisation commitments due to the length of the original tools. To try to maintain the usefulness of the tools, the reduced number of statements featured were carefully selected to ensure a similar number of positive and negative statements were used.

The change in the medium in which the surveys were distributed could potentially be a limitation in terms of consistency; however the use of an electronic version did elicit further valuable responses. The author also took steps to try and eliminate any bias by ensuring the questions and response categories were identical in both formats of the survey.

In an ideal world it would have been enormously useful to be able to match the absence records of the respondents and their team to their survey responses, however ethically this was considered unwise. This was based on the fact that it may have been more difficult to guarantee anonymity, as there would have been a risk of individuals being identified indirectly through their responses. It was also feared based on past research investigating sensitive issues that requiring the respondents to include identifiable information may have reduced the response rate further.

6.9. Summary

This chapter has played a significant role in addressing the following research objective of this study:

- To analyse the data and synthesise with extant research to progress the current theory base and enable an original contribution to knowledge

Through the analysis of the survey data, a clear picture of the key results has emerged which allows the research question to be addressed.

The principle findings from the univariate analysis were:

- FLMS accept they have a responsibility for managing absence and it is an important element of their role.

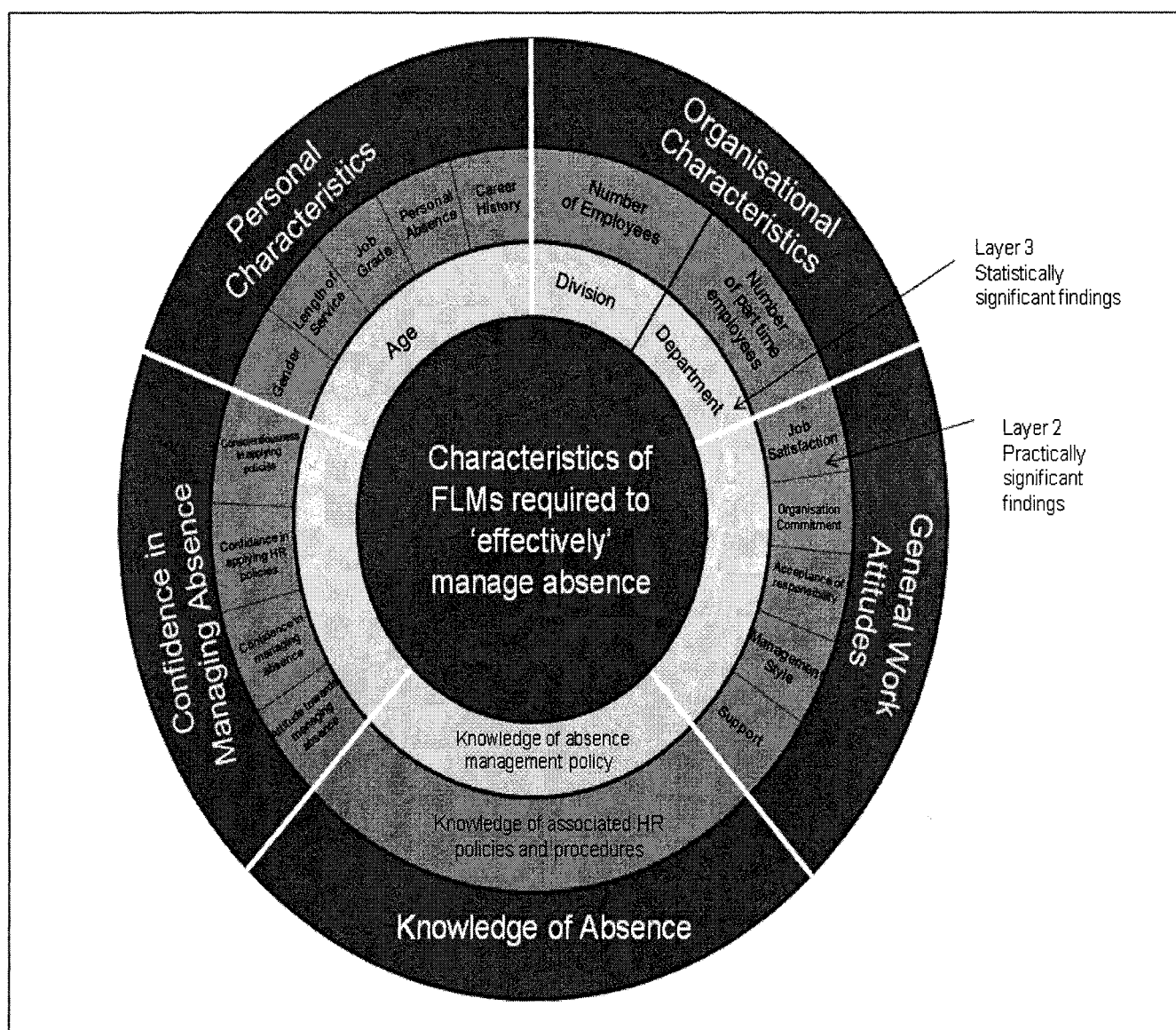
- There is some confusion over which groups of stakeholders have responsibilities for specific tasks such as identifying when an employee has hit a trigger point.
- The vast majority of FLMS (95.5%) carry out return-to-work interviews after every period of absence.
- Although the majority of FLMS (83.1%) regularly monitor absence levels, nearly a fifth do not.
- In terms of the support they receive in managing absence, FLMS rated the HR Department most poorly.
- The majority of FLMS believe they are reasonably knowledgeable about related HR policies and are reasonably confident in applying them within the workplace.

Looking specifically at the research question which guides this study, the second stage of the survey results shows multiple statistically significant associations or differences between variables related to FLMS and the absence levels of their subordinates. It is therefore possible to state that as a result of this research, a number of characteristics required by FLMS to manage absence effectively have been identified. Statistically significant results involving a number of variables and levels of employee absence including; the age of the FLM ($p=0.006$); the division ($p=0.01$) and departments ($p=0.02$) in which the FLMS work; and their levels of knowledge of the organisation's absence management policy and procedures ($p=0.048$). This allowed the rejection of the null hypotheses and states: *there is an association or difference between these variables and levels of absence of the FLMS' employees*. However, there are also other interesting results of high practical significance despite the results not being *statistically* significant. These include associations between variables such as career history and associations with other stakeholders, when correlated with the absence levels of the FLMS' employees.

The results presented in this chapter confirm that research into the characteristics of FLMS required to manage absence effectively can contribute to the existing theory base in understanding absence management. The combination of a number of statistically and practically significant results allows the opportunity to make a valuable contribution.

In Chapter Three, the first model for this study was presented which incorporated all of the five key hypotheses and 21 sub-hypotheses. Now the survey research with FLMs has been carried out, this model has been modified to demonstrate the results of the hypotheses testing. The revised model is shown in Figure 66 and clarifies the contribution to knowledge that has been referred to throughout this thesis.

Figure 66 Revised conceptual model for this study



This model is useful as it emphasises the importance of considering all of the different variables, whilst placing increased emphasis on the characteristics that were statistically significant.

Figure 66 addresses the overall research question for this study by identifying the characteristics of; age of the FLM; division in which the FLM works; department in which the FLM works and the FLMs' knowledge of the absence management policy; these all have an association with the reported levels of absence of their subordinates. This implies organisations should consider these factors when considering or redesigning their overall approach to managing absence.

Despite the fact variables such as confidence in applying the policy are not statistically significant; it is recommended that organisations should still follow best practice guidance in this area and support their FLMs to gain appropriate confidence and skills to carry out their role.

Chapter Seven provides the conclusions of this research, including a detailed overview of the findings and drawing together the results from both the primary and secondary research. In addition, the research is evaluated and the proposed contribution to knowledge is reviewed.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

7.1. Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis and provides a final summary of how the research question '*What are the characteristics of FLMs required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?*' has been addressed and how the aims and objectives have been met through this work. This chapter also summarises the five principal hypotheses investigated through the survey to FLMs before presenting the final conceptual model which represents the survey results. It is proposed that this model is one of the key outcomes which demonstrates the diverse range of variables investigated. The research is also explored by evaluating perceived overall strengths and limitations of the process and final outcomes. The overall contribution to knowledge is reaffirmed as it has been considered throughout each of the preceding chapters. The chapter concludes by setting out areas for future research in managing absence.

7.2. Research conclusions

The role of FLMs is crucial both in general HRM (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Bond and Wise, 2003 and Hales, 2007) and specifically in relation to absence management (James et al., 2002; Cunningham et al., 2004 and Watson et al., 2007). A distinct gap was presented in detail in Chapter Three of this thesis which confirmed that the role of FLMs in managing absence is an under-researched area, where there is a genuine demand for a greater understanding to progress the knowledge base. This was reflected strongly in existing research by van Dierendonck et al. (2002).

Employing a deductive research strategy for this work has enabled the research question to be answered by identifying the characteristics of FLMs required to manage absence effectively. This was achieved through the careful construction of hypotheses from the existing theory base that were subsequently tested within the questionnaire. To comply with the traditions of an objectivist philosophy, care was taken to measure the concepts as objectively as possible and to report the results of all of the hypotheses, regardless of whether they were statistically significant or not.

In addition to testing the hypotheses to identify the characteristics of FLMS, the extant research base emphasised the importance of the support required by FLMS to effectively manage absence. Specifically this included the crucial role played by the absence management policies (emphasised in the work of Dibben et al., 2001a and Hayday, 2006), the need to have an integrated and holistic approach with other HR policies (McHugh, 2001 and Bennett, 2002) and the requirement for the importance of absence management to be embedded throughout the organisations documents and plans (McGovern et al., 1997). Completing this secondary research based aspect of the study also enabled the successful completion of one of this study's principal objectives.

Using a secondary research method which involved policy and documentary analysis can prove to be a challenge within a positivist study, however through the careful construction of criteria that have been generated from the existing theory base, a measurement instrument was designed to test them as objectively as possible. Whilst there have been limitations to this approach which have been outlined in the research framework chapter (and revisited at the end of the current chapter) this appears to be normal in organisational research, where there are potential limitations of all strategies and methods (King et al., 1994).

Overall, one of the indications of whether an appropriate research philosophy and resultant methodology was chosen is the extent to which the research question can be answered. This chapter provides the response to the overall research question, thereby indicating that appropriate decisions were made, whilst at the same time recognising that there were other approaches that could have been used. Reflections are also offered on how additional research methods could be used to enhance future studies in this area.

Table 34 provides further confirmation of the appropriateness of the research strategy by providing a brief recap of how the objectives of this study have been met within this thesis.

Table 34 Final summary of research objectives

Objective	Evidence of meeting the objective
<p>To establish the characteristics of FLMS required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations.</p>	<p>Appropriate characteristics of FLMS were identified through the review and development of the literature in Chapter Three. These characteristics were measured within the survey to FLMS. This was achieved through a combination of direct questions and multiple item scales to measure more complex concepts.</p>
<p>To review literature in relation to the effective management of absence, and approaches in the public sector to establish a gap of existing knowledge</p>	<p>Chapter Three provided a thorough review of the existing research on absence management, the context of the UK public sector and combined this with work on the role of FLMS. These three areas were assimilated to drive the research forwards and to inform the research methods and hypotheses.</p>
<p>To design and implement an appropriate methodology and quantitative methods to establish the characteristics of FLMS to 'effectively' manage absence.</p>	<p>Chapter Four detailed the research approach taken and the consistency in the choice of research methods. Chapters Five and Six provided further evidence of the appropriateness of quantitative methods.</p>
<p>To analyse the data and synthesise with extant research in order to progress the current theory base and enable an original contribution to knowledge.</p>	<p>Chapters Five and Six provided a discussion of the data analysis findings from both the primary and secondary research. Explicit links are made in both chapters with research in the field and how these results enhance existing knowledge.</p>
<p>To communicate the findings of the research to the benefit of UK public sector organisations</p>	<p>The final section of Chapter Seven provides a series of recommendations for organisations that will be disseminated upon the conclusion of this research alongside a summary of the research findings.</p>

7.2.1. Primary research

The survey of FLMS covered a wide range of areas related to absence management in order to meet the aims of this study and answer the research question. It is also important not to underestimate the results of some of the more descriptive tests using percentages which present an interesting picture of the practices of FLMS and the organisation. For example; 95.5% of the FLM respondents stated that they did carry out a return-to-work interview after every absence. This is clearly a positive result which is in line with the best practice discussed by CIPD (2007b) and Acas (2006) yet the organisation's absence data remains higher than average when compared to other similar organisations as well as national statistics (e.g. CBI, 2008). This implies the conclusion that sometimes the use of best practice interventions does not lead to a measureable impact on absence levels and queries whether the use of return-to-work interviews is an essential part of managing absence effectively. Alternatively, return-to-work interviews may be most useful when they are used in conjunction with other absence management interventions.

A further example looks at the issue of the confidence in applying the organisation's absence policies whereby 84% of respondents agreed that they were confident in applying the policies. Considering the work of Dibben et al. (2001a) and Hayday et al. (2007) this would appear to be a positive result as confidence is deemed to be as important as having the requisite skills and knowledge in absence management issues. Although this means that the remaining 16% of respondents were not confident, this allows the generation of a specific training need which is line with the work of Lawler and Hackman (1969) and Arnott and Emmerson (2001) who believe that FLMS should be consulted over their needs for absence management training programmes. These results raise an interesting query, as despite the fact that the majority have rated themselves as confidence, the absence levels in the organisation remain high. One possible explanation is that the FLMS self-assessment may not be justified if they are actually not implementing the policies correctly in line with the organisation's requirements.

Issues such as levels of job satisfaction and organisation commitment also need to be carefully considered despite the lack of statistically significant associations within this individual study. However, these particular results need to be interpreted within the context of previous studies of absence management where there are inconsistent findings in whether an association exists with levels of absence. Looking from an organisational perspective, it is also likely that the organisation will be interested in trying to enhance these variables anyway for the benefit of the employees' overall performance in the organisation. This is evident within the questions that are covered within the organisation's internal employee survey and their responses to the survey findings which are disseminated to all employees (GMBC, 2006d).

Additional practical issues are also likely to have a direct impact on levels of absence despite the fact they are not statistically shown to do so within the context of this individual research study. One important example is the 12.5% of respondents who stated absence is not recorded on a daily basis. This is contrary to the advice of (Cabinet Office, 2004) which is clear about the requirement for absence to be recorded accurately on a timely basis. The response to this question also highlights possible inconsistencies between FLMs where they are not all recording absences. This could have negative repercussions for taking further actions on poor absence records if the correct procedures and records have not been followed and maintained (CIPD, 2007c).

The univariate analysis also provided evidence of some of the common weaknesses in absence management practices in organisations. For example, James et al. (2002) suggested that FLMs do not always receive adequate support from their HR colleagues, and this was confirmed within the current research. The implication of this is that FLMs are unlikely to be able to manage absence effectively if they do not have the expert support that they require (Hayday et al., 2007), particularly when considering the complex links with employment legislation (Harris, 2005).

Researchers such as Dibben et al (2001a) and Robson (2007b) have also continuously emphasised the importance of FLMs' recognising the roles played by all of the different stakeholders, yet the survey results suggest that this is still not always the case within GMBC. This may lead to the duplication of efforts, or alternatively that some tasks do not get carried out. Issues related to consistency may also be relevant here if some FLMs follow the procedures more or less stringently than their colleagues.

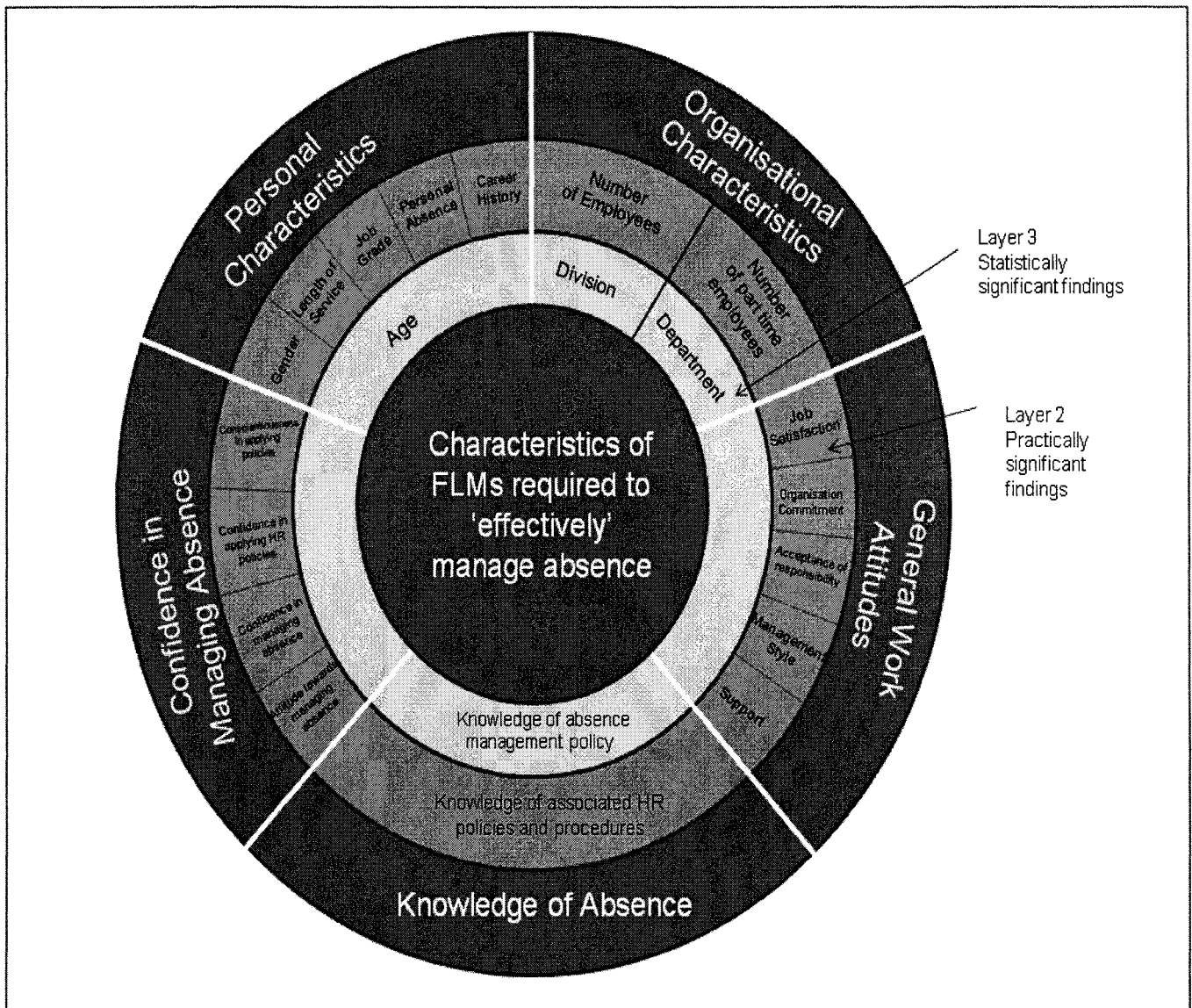
In order to be able to test the hypotheses for this study, a series of further statistical tests were carried out. In total five hypotheses and twenty one sub-hypotheses were examined. An overview of the conclusions from the principle hypotheses are shown in Table 35.

Table 35 Overview of key hypotheses

Hypothesis	Research findings
1. H_0 - No association exists between the personal characteristics of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates.	A statistically significant association was found between the age of the FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates. None of the other sub-hypotheses were statistically significant.
2. H_0 - No association exists between the organisational characteristics in which the FLMs work and the levels of absence of their subordinates.	Statistically significant associations were found for both the Division and Department in which the FLMs worked. None of the other sub-hypotheses were statistically significant.
3. H_0 - No association exists between the general work attitudes of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates.	None of the sub-hypotheses showed a statistically significant association with the levels of absence therefore the overall hypothesis of an association had to be rejected.
4. H_0 - No association exists between how knowledgeable FLMs are in relation to absence and the levels of absence of their subordinates.	A statistically significant association was found between knowledge of the organisation's absence policy and levels of absence. No significant association was found with knowledge of associated absence policies.
5. H_0 - No association exists between the attitudes towards absence of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates.	None of the sub-hypotheses showed a statistically significant association with the levels of absence therefore the overall hypothesis of an association had to be rejected.

The results from the survey-based hypotheses testing led to the generation of the revised model which is reproduced in Figure 67. The creation of this model may enable other researchers to test it within the context of their own research to potentially extend their understanding of the characteristics of FLMs required to manage absence effectively which may have an impact on the absence levels of their subordinates.

Figure 67 Final conceptual model for this study



Whilst this model highlights that there were only four statistically significant results, it is argued that the other results can be practically significant or important (Morgan et al., 2004). Accordingly, these are areas that organisations should still consider when reviewing or updating their approach to absence management.

The rigorous process undertaken by this research still enables a significant contribution due to the fact that the initial model was generated objectively through the review of existing literature and then systematically tested as hypotheses using appropriate statistical techniques. In line with the chosen research strategy, all of the survey results were reported rather than eliminating those that did not produce conclusive results.

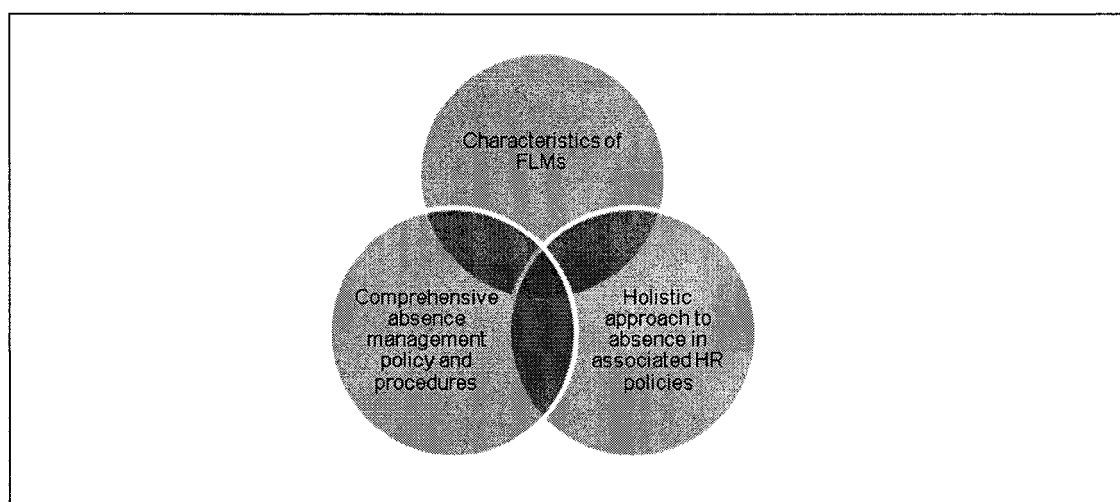
7.2.2. Secondary research

The important role played by the secondary research was discussed in an earlier chapter but is reviewed again in this Conclusions chapter to demonstrate how these research methods contribute towards answering the overall research question and objectives of this study.

Even where FLMs have the characteristics required to manage absence effectively, this can only be achieved where there is an adequate supporting framework. In earlier chapters, the work of Deery et al. (1995) and Dalton and Todor (1993) has been highlighted as they confirm the crucial role played by absence management policies. This is further confirmed in many of the practitioner-focused and Governmental papers such as Cabinet Office (1998 and 2004); Employers Organisation (2005b); Investors in People (2006); National Audit Office (2004a and 2006). It was therefore appropriate to test the absence management policies as part of this research to supplement the primary data that was collected from the questionnaires to FLMs. In addition, the work of McHugh (2001) and Bennett (2002) emphasised the importance of absence management being dealt with holistically throughout the related HR policies rather than as a distinct issue.

Figure 68 represents how these concepts inter-relate and in doing so, illustrates that comprehensive absence management policies are integral to the process, as well as the need to be assisted by the associated HR policies as part of a holistic approach. In addition to the characteristics of FLMs, it is suggested that all three of these components are an important part of successful absence management.

Figure 68 Framework demonstrating the links between characteristics of FLMs and the importance of policies



The present study has focused on the importance of the content of the absence management (and associated) policies so that the FLMs have a solid foundation to work from. This was based on the argument that in order to be able to carry out their prescribed role in managing absence, there needs to be clarity in what the FLMs are required to do (Renwick, 2003), and when they should work in partnership with senior managers, HR, and Occupational Health (Cunningham et al., 2004). For example, if FLMs are not aware of the need to carry out a return-to-work interview after every period of absence (regardless of length) it is unlikely all of the interviews will be performed. Therefore there is a potential impact on absence levels as research by CIPD (2008b) provides evidence of return-to-work interviews being the most effective way of reducing absences; particularly for short term absences which are not medically certified.

The analysis of the absence policies highlighted several issues. Firstly, seven different documents were identified which cover information in relation to absence management. This potentially provides an area of ambiguity if FLMs and employees are not aware of all of the documents or refer to different sources when dealing with absence cases. The existence of seven documents meant that no individual policy was able to meet all twenty one of the criteria, however cumulatively all of the criteria were covered when considering all of the documents.

Three areas in particular were identified due to their low scores in the current format, the three areas were: legal content; types of absence; and practical issues. Chapter Five provides further information on the exact criteria which need to be incorporated into the documents. These are clearly important areas as Cabinet Office (1998) and National Audit Office (2004b) suggests that it is necessary to include the legally-focused information and failure to comply with this could be problematic. Hayday et al. (2007) argued that it is necessary to differentiate between short and long term absences due to the different interventions that need to be used to manage them effectively. It is also important that the practical information is included so that all of the stakeholders, including employees are clear about what they need to do during and after periods of sickness absence.

The review of the associated policies produced a wide spectrum of results, whereby some of the policies were able to meet all of the criteria (Flexible Working and Health and Safety policies). However, there was evidence of policies failing to be explicit about their links to absence management which was a considerable weakness in light of the need for absence to be managed holistically (Bennett, 2002; Cabinet Office, 2004). Whilst GMBC believe that absence management is a strategic priority, this needs to be evidenced more clearly within policies and procedures. This may involve specific cross-referencing between the documents.

Reflecting on the results of the employee survey findings and the documents categorised as 'Corporate' and 'Councillor led' it is clear from multiple sources of evidence (GMBC, 2005a; CVOS Committee, 2007b) that sickness absence is considered to be an important issue at GMBC. However, on many occasions the focus on absence was more statistically based without any accompanying discussions or action points. It is therefore difficult to ascertain what interventions might have been introduced and the impact that they may have had on levels of absence. There is also a potential implication that the issue was not treated seriously enough, and may send a message out to managers at different levels that this was not a priority issue for them.

In later documents e.g. CVOS Committee, (2006a) this issue was overcome through the identification of a range of key issues for the organisation, followed by a series of recommendations. This demonstrates GMBC's commitment to this area and shows that resources were dedicated in an attempt to tackle the problem of having higher than average levels of sickness absence. This appears to be consistent with the findings by the Audit Commission (Audit Commission, 2006) when they conducted their evaluation of GMBC.

Careful analysis of the recommendations raised the issue of the anticipated audience, as the majority were at a strategic level and did not feature sufficient suggestions at an operational level. This is in opposition to the recommendations and the work of Purcell et al. (2003) who imply that FLMs should be involved in the evaluation process, particularly when it is likely that the FLMs will have some responsibility for implementing any changes to practices. From an FLM perspective this may also suggest that there is nothing that FLMs can do to try and tackle the problem, whereas the work of Cunningham et al. (2006) suggests that FLMs play a significant role in tackling absence management problems.

After reflecting on some of the key findings from the primary and secondary research, it is appropriate to consider how the two types of data are linked. The linkage between these 'concepts' (the characteristics of FLMs; the absence management policy and the need for a holistic approach to the related HR policies) has been discussed previously and this argument has centred on the need for FLMs to be supported by policies that clarify their roles (and those of the other stakeholders) and are in line with good practice in effective absence management (e.g. Acas, 2006). The results from these research methods have provided more detail about the extent to which the absence management policies appear to be fit for purpose when tested against the 21 criteria that were identified from previous works. The lack of one comprehensive absence management policy made this difficult to test, and demonstrates that it is likely that there may have been inconsistencies in FLMs' practices if they had been consulting a range of (sometimes semi-contradictory) documents. This infers that despite the characteristics of the FLMs that were tested, a variable outside of their control may have had an impact on their ability to manage absence effectively.

Similarly, there was evidence through the evaluation of the associated HR policies that clear links with absence management were not made. These practices may have made it more difficult for FLMs to have understood the links between them which might have encouraged the more effective management of absence in line with the propositions by McHugh (2001) and Bennett (2002).

7.2.3. Overall research findings

This study supports the supposition from extant research that FLMs play an important role in managing absence effectively. This confirms the work of a range of authors including Cunningham et al. (2006) who identified the role of FLMs as a key issue in managing absence effectively and the work of van Dierendonck et al. (2002) who believed that this was an under-researched area. Through the consideration of the presented hypotheses, valuable information has been gained about the specific characteristics of FLMs which may have an association with the absence levels of their subordinates. This has enabled the author to piece together some of the fragmented findings from previous research in order to test a series of variables together for the first time.

In addition to the formal hypotheses that were constructed and tested with the survey responses, this research also supports a number of themes that were presented within the literature review. For example, Chapter Two provides clear evidence to support the claim by Millard and Machin (2007) who suggest the characteristics of public sector workforces are different from those within the private sector. This may have some direct implications on the levels of absence at GMBC as Tuffin (2001) confirms that part-time workers are absent more than their full time counterparts and 51% of GMBC's employees are on part time contracts. In addition, Barham and Begum (2005) identifies that women are more likely to be absent than men, and the statistics outlined in Chapter Two shows that 66.4% of their workforce are female. These characteristics are particularly pronounced in the department previously known as Social Services, which is a pattern which is a pattern which is common across Social Services Departments (Employers Organisation, 2005a).

In addition Balloch et al. (1995) and Seccombe (1995) argued that there are other issues which lead to increased absence in these departments such as a higher incidence of work-related injuries including assaults by clients. Therefore it is likely that employees within these functional areas may be almost predisposed to have higher levels of sickness absence before any organisational based variables are taken into account. In addition, these facts may aid the argument for generalisability.

The differences in absence levels between divisions and departments does not infer that organisations should automatically accept higher levels of sickness absence in these areas; as they could focus on identifying specific issues and implement interventions where appropriate. In terms of managing absence 'effectively' this will involve FLMs and other stakeholders looking to identify any potential problems which may be contributing towards levels of sickness absence; and managing them in line with the best practice that has been detailed within this thesis. The author's initial definition of 'effectively' managing absence should also be drawn upon to reflect the need for a balanced approach. This approach would involve making the organisation's absence management policy clear, whereby genuinely ill employees are supported, but non-genuine absences are dealt with appropriately.

After conducting the policy analysis, support can be provided to Deery et al's (1995) comments on the importance of having effective policies. Conversely this raises an issue as to whether there is an association with levels of absence as the policies covered all of the best practice guidance that was amalgamated from a variety of sources (Australian Public Service Commission, 2006; Bevan, 2003; National Audit Office 2004b; Hayday, 2008; Cunningham et al., 2004; Dibben et al., 2001a; James et al. 2002; Cabinet Office, 1998; Cunningham and James, 2000; Hayday et al, 2007a; Hayday, 2006; Bevan and Hayday, 2003; Acas, 2006; CIPD, 2007b; DPP, 2008), and despite this the levels of absence remain higher than average. However, this does not mean that the policies should not be followed rigorously as it is essential that FLMs understand the role that they have to play as well as the tasks that they need to carry out (McHugh, 2002).

The policy documents are also needed to clarify their relationships with other key stakeholders (Dibben et al., 2001a and Hayday et al., 2005). In addition, clear policies and procedures will enable FLMs to manage absence more consistently which is line with the recommendations identified by Bond and McCracken (2005) for effective HR practices.

When considering the findings that are presented within this thesis it is important to situate them within the context of GMBC. For example, whilst levels of absence are higher than average as GMBC reported an average of 13.13 days per employee per year in 2007 compared to the national average of eight days (CIPD, 2008b) this is in line with general public sector findings in this area. However, this may be in part attributable to the profile of the workforce because of the high numbers of part time and female workers, where research has shown that both of these groups typically have higher than average levels of sickness absence (Tuffin, 2001 and Barham and Begum, 2005). Similarly, the context of the organisation which was explored within Chapter Two may also have an impact. Factors such as the location of the organisation in an area of deprivation are relevant because a large percentage of the workforce resides within the borough. This presents a challenge for the organisation in that there are issues which can potentially affect the health (and absence levels) of their employees, that GMBC have no control over. However, this does not mean that the organisation should not continue to implement the practices to manage absence effectively that have been identified within this thesis.

This section concludes by responding to the principle research question which has guided this study: *'What are the characteristics of FLMs required to 'effectively' manage absence in UK public sector organisations?'*

The characteristics of FLMs which are associated with the levels of absence of their subordinates are age of FLM; Division in which the FLM works; Department in which the FLM works and the FLMs' knowledge of the absence management policy. Therefore the levels of absence of the FLMs' subordinates can potentially be explained by collecting this information.

However, the additional variables shown in Figure 66 should also be taken into consideration as they may be practically significant and are driven from existing research. Alternatively in a larger study with a higher number of potential respondents, the associations may prove to be statistically significant when completed by a larger sample.

In conjunction with the identification of the characteristics of FLMS required to manage absence effectively, the FLMS need to be supported within the framework of the organisation having a comprehensive absence policy (Deery et al., 1995) which is in line with best practice criteria identified in Chapter Four). The results from this study have shown that cumulatively all of the best practice criteria are contained within GMBC's policy documents which are a positive result. However the presentation of the information in the documents is an area for review as there are currently a large number of inter-related documents.

After considering all of these results and conclusions, it is appropriate to summarise that the 'effective' management of absence can be enhanced through the identification of a set of characteristics of the FLMS; the support of a comprehensive absence management policy (or policies in this instance) and the treatment of absence management as a holistic part of HRM. Therefore, these strategies will support the organisation to manage absence by minimising non-genuine absences whilst at the same time being supportive to employees that are genuinely ill. This is consistent with the definition of 'effective' absence management which has been used throughout this thesis. For example; the absence management policy needs to be clear about the use of return-to-work interviews after every period of absence, as work by Dunn and Wilkinson (2001) suggests that this can be a deterrent to employees, whilst Robson (2008b) argues that they can genuinely be a supportive process for employees and potentially minimise periods of absence (Evans et al., 2002). A further example would be that the importance of role clarity for the FLMS has been emphasised throughout the literature (e.g. Rappe and Zwick, 2007 and Hutchinson, 2008), and this will allow them to manage absence more consistently (Hayday, 2007 and Robson, 2007b) and more confidently (Dibben et al, 2001a). This should mean that a strong message is sent to employees about the need to attend work whenever possible, with attendance being the norm.

7.3. Contribution to knowledge

This chapter confirms the contribution to knowledge of this thesis that has been explored and demonstrated throughout the six preceding chapters. The principal contribution to knowledge centres around the attention paid to FLMs in managing absence.

The review of the literature provided evidence of a number of studies which stated that FLMs were an important part of the managing absence process but did not investigate this issue in detail (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995; McHugh, 2001; Cunningham and James, 2000; Bennett, 2002; and Hayday, 2006).

The gap in the current literature was demonstrated by Van Dierendonck et al. (2002:84) who states:

Only a few studies have explicitly investigated the role of the direct supervisor as an important influence. In the management literature, the importance of supervisory, or leadership, behaviour as a potential cause of subordinate absenteeism is widely emphasized. However, only a few empirical studies support this premise.

Instead, many of the studies commenting on the role of FLMs focused on recommendations such as ensuring that they understand the absence policy (Bond and Wise, 2003); receive adequate training (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995); and are offered support from HR (James et al., 2002). These studies could be summarised by stating that they sought to identify interventions that organisations can use to manage absence effectively. The alternative focus of the extant research described the challenges encountered by FLMs when carrying out their absence management and related HR duties. This includes their failure to carry out all of their duties due to time constraints (Hutchinson and Wood, 1995) and lack of consistency in approach by adopting 'common sense strategies' (Bond and McCracken, 2005). Therefore, focusing this study specifically on the FLMs adds a new insight into understanding the complex phenomenon of effective absence management.

This study develops the understanding of FLMs managing absence by providing a comprehensive insight into a number of characteristics of FLMs which could potentially have an impact on the absence levels of the employees that they are responsible for.

This brings together research from a previously fragmented theory base whereby individual authors identified one or two variables but did not test out multiple ones with the same research participants. As a consequence, future researchers are provided with a model that could be tested in different contexts and the opportunity to explore either individual variables in more detail, or test the entire conceptual model.

Whilst the model shown in Figure 67 indicates that there are four specific variables which have a statistically significant association, it also conceptualises the wide range of characteristics of FLMS which may have an impact in practical terms. Although the testing of variables such as gender, career history and length of service did not uncover a statistically significant association, evidence remains in the literature base that there may be links between them which might be uncovered within future research. It is important that this context of the research is recognised to confirm the wide-ranging variables which can impact upon subordinate absence levels that have been identified in past studies, so they still remain credible variables despite the fact that the tests were inconclusive within this individual study.

Specific findings from this research can offer a 'headline' contribution to knowledge. Accordingly, that a correlation exists between the following variables and the resulting levels of absence of the FLMS' subordinates:

- The age of the FLMS
- The division in which the FLMS work
- The department in which the FLMS work
- The FLMS' knowledge of the organisation's absence management policy and procedures

Whilst it was argued in an earlier chapter that the variables of 'division' and 'department' in which the FLMS work were likely to have a relationship with levels of subordinate absence because of the purposive sampling method, it remains important to demonstrate that these facts were substantiated within the survey responses of the FLM respondents.

Moving away from the results of the survey that was completed by the FLMs, the range of research methods used within this study also expands the field and overcomes the limitations declared by Ackroyd and Thompson (1999:13) who stated: *“the most prevalent activity in much research into absenteeism involves poring over documents”*. When providing this quote the authors were reflecting on the fact that a large proportion of absence based research involves researchers obtaining historical absence data and then manipulating this data to analyse it in different ways. This Doctoral study used the absence data as part of the contextual picture on the case organisation but then gained the views of FLMs on a wide variety of issues that were identified in previous research studies. This approach of policy analysis brings an extra layer of information as even when the actual process of data analysis is deliberately kept simple, an interesting range of data can be provided. Within this study, the policy analysis adds an additional dimension which allows a greater understanding of how absence is managed in the organisation as well as a detailed insight into the constraints FLMs work within. The work of authors such as Deery et al. (1995) and Bennett (2002) confirms the importance of the absence management policy to FLMs and justifies the inclusion of policy analysis as one of the key research objectives.

Furthermore, it is proposed that the specific tool used to evaluate organisational absence policies could also be replicated to enhance future research projects. Through the provision of a framework, researchers could benchmark the absence policies of different organisations to identify strengths and weaknesses as well as a tool to design new policies. Although there are potential issues related to the stability of the policy analysis criteria (as discussed within the research framework limitations), this tool may be useful to HR researchers who employ quantitative research strategies using empirically underpinned tools.

Finally, the concept of ‘effective’ absence management has been a theme throughout this thesis, with the author’s definition being provided in Chapter Three:

Managing absence by minimising non-genuine absences so employees are only absent when they are unable to attend; whilst at the same time, ensuring that genuinely absent employees receive appropriate levels of support in line with the organisation’s policies and procedures.

In relation to the contribution to knowledge that is proffered by this study, it is important that this concept of 'effective' absence management is also given due attention. Accordingly, the overall contribution relates to the fact that this study has identified the characteristics of FLMs required to manage absence effectively, and shown that they need to be supported by good absence management policies and related HR policies which include clear links to absence management. Combining this information together will encourage and facilitate the 'effective' management of absence so that un-necessary periods of absence can be discouraged, lengths of genuine absence can be minimised and employees can feel genuinely supported if they are genuinely absent due to ill-health.

7.4. Recommendations for practice

Although the principal aim of this study was to contribute to knowledge and expand the existing theory base, the practical nature of the subject of absence management means that a number of organisation-focused recommendations can be provided. This is consistent with one of the implicit themes from the work of Johns (2003) who states that absence research can and should be capable of providing some practical recommendations.

7.4.1. Overall recommendations

Overall, this study has demonstrated even where best practice interventions have been introduced, the organisation continues to have higher than average levels of sickness absence. This suggests the implementation of best practice content alone may not be sufficient. Organisations should therefore focus on:

- How new initiatives including HR policies and procedures are implemented so that FLMs are familiar with the content of them, therefore enabling them to follow them more easily.
- The importance of the role of FLMs in applying new HR policies and procedures and communicating information to their employees. This could involve reinforcing to them the important role that they play in the successful implementation and delivery of HR policies (Purcell and Hutchison, 2007).
- FLMs should be provided with appropriate levels of training and support to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. This training should address

confidence (Hayday, 2006), knowledge (Cabinet Office, 2004) and skills (Acas, 2006).

- The need for clarity in the roles of different stakeholders should be incorporated within all new HR processes and procedures (Renwick, 2003).

Looking specifically at absence management:

- FLMs need to have (and be able to demonstrate) a sound interpretation and understanding of the organisation's policy and procedures (Robson, 2008a).
- Absence management training should be specific to the needs of the FLMs, rather than just the use of a standard training programme (Robson, 2007b).
- Absence management is most effective when it is part of a holistic HR process, as a result associated HR policies and practices may need to be reviewed (Bennett, 2002).
- FLMs must receive training so that they are clear about the links between absence management and other HR policies and procedures and be comfortable about how this is operationalised within their roles.
- General good practice criteria should still be referred to as even without evidence of the extent to which it may reduce levels of absence, failure to use them may lead to increased absence levels. This includes effective recording and monitoring of absences (Johnson et al, 2003); the use of return-to-work interviews; and the introduction of proactive health interventions (BITC, 2007).

7.4.2. Recommendations for public sector organisations

As the public sector consistently has higher levels of absence (CIPD, 2007a and CBI, 2008) absence management needs to be a clear priority for the organisation and this needs to be cascaded throughout the organisation. This should include:

- Ensuring visible senior management commitment (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003)
- Gaining the 'buy-in' of FLMs (Johnson et al., 2003)
- Collection of accurate absence data (National Audit Office, 2006)
- Absence data to be provided in appropriate formats (Arnott and Emmerson, 2001) to allow the use of trigger points.

- Delivery of appropriate training to FLMS (Truss, 2001) which should be updated regularly
- Support for newly appointed FLMS on their people management responsibilities (Butterfield et al., 2005)

7.4.3. Recommendations for GMBC

Whilst this research only identified a small number of statistically significant associations, a number of issues were highlighted that would be of practical interest to GMBC:

- This research demonstrates that GMBC appears to comply with the majority of the best practice criteria that were explored within Chapter Three. This provides a source of frustration as absence levels are still above the national average, however it does not mean that the organisation should cease to use its existing absence management interventions. This outcome is not unusual in organisational research. An example is provided in the work of Truss (2001:1143) who commented:

despite Hewlett-Packard's financial success and apparent application of 'High Performance Work Practices' in areas such as appraisals and training and development, the results obtained were not uniformly excellent; in fact, some were highly contradictory

- GMBC could consider condensing their current seven documents which are related to absence management into one comprehensive document. This will be useful for all stakeholders and should help to ensure a consistent approach to dealing with absences, which is an important issue (Acas, 2006).
- GMBC should design and instigate a mechanism to enable them to be able to identify who their FLMS are more easily. This would enable them to tailor communications specific to this audience and ensure that all FLMS are receiving the same information and support. In addition, it would facilitate the organisation and delivery of training which is essential as part of their continuing professional development.

- Relationships between the key stakeholders need to be clarified, and particularly the working arrangement between FLMs and the HR Department. This could be achieved through the holding of a team building event, looking specifically at absence management.
- The monitoring of the performance of FLMs in managing absence needs to be implemented more widely so it is accepted as a normal management process. This is reinforced by the survey results where only 8% of respondents strongly agreed and 37.5% agreed that their performance was monitored in this area. This would enable the identification of FLMs who are not routinely carrying out their return-to-work interviews or ensuring that the relevant actions are being carried out when a trigger point has been reached. This is vitally important to ensure that all employees are being treated equally in relation to the way that their FLM deals with managing sickness absence.
- GMBC needs to consider the differences between CBS and CES in terms of sickness absence. The statistics are clear about the difference in levels of sickness absence but there are also noticeable variations in other areas, for example; only 45.5% of return-to-work interviews are carried out in CBS compared to 90% in CES. Failure to carry out these return-to-work interviews after every period of absence may partially account for the reason why CBS have a higher than average level of absence. This also raises a question about the extent to which the other prescribed interventions such as counselling interviews are carried out. Action points may include the consideration of differentiating the training that is provided for the FLMs in the two divisions or alternatively launching an awareness campaign for all FLMs and employees in CBS. GMBC could also benchmark their performance in these two divisions against other similar Local Authorities to ensure that they are being compared 'like-with-like'.

Whilst considering these recommendations, a number of positive results which arose from this study should also be acknowledged. These issues are recounted in Figure 69.

Figure 69 Positive aspects of GMBC's absence management process

- The majority of FLMs are confident in carrying out their role in absence management
- The levels of absence of FLMs is low in comparison to the national average
- Evidence of commitment from senior managers and councillors
- FLMs accept responsibility for managing the absence of their employees
- A predominantly positive picture was gained on general work attitudes
- Evidence of FLMs recognising the importance of supporting their employees
- 81.8% of FLMs said that managing absence was an important part of their daily routine
- Evidence of innovation in absence management practices (e.g. Counselling interviews)

7.5. Strengths and limitations of this research

7.5.1. Strengths

This research combines a contribution to the existing knowledge base with the potential for practical implications in public sector organisations. The flow of this thesis has examined how this work supports some of the classic studies in this area such as Nicholson (1977) and Steers and Rhodes (1978) by adding in the dimension of the role played by FLMs. In addition, it responds to the request from Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) who felt that wider absence management issues needed to be focused upon.

A thorough insight into GMBC is provided within this work which allows a sound understanding of some of the key variables that may impact upon absence levels. This also illustrates some of the complexities involved in managing absence, particularly when considering all of the potential influences, some of which are unseen or difficult to measure.

Whilst the importance of absence management policies was clear in the literature, this study has brought the issue to the forefront and emphasised its importance when looking at other variables. Without comprehensive policies, it would be very difficult to achieve consistency in the approach which is an important part of effective human resource management (Deery et al., 1995).

The research design was sufficiently robust to be able to cope with the fact that there were not as many statistically significant associations as hypothesised. As all of the results were reported (no variables or hypotheses have been omitted), this allows readers to feel a confidence that they are understanding the whole picture and identify factors which either influence or have an impact upon levels of sickness absence.

The final strength of this research is that there are clear implications for practice as well as the contribution to the theory base. The generation of the practical recommendations within this chapter may encourage organisations to consider the importance of FLMS and act upon some of the suggestions.

7.5.2. Limitations

All research studies encounter limitations as there is no perfect formula for carrying out research and there are always variables that are outside of the control of the researcher (Bryman, 2004). This study encountered a number of methodological issues; however awareness of these issues allows the results to be interpreted with these taken into consideration.

There is a potential limitation related to the use of one organisation as the focus for this research and although Eisenhardt (1991) acknowledges that this can still provide a valuable contribution, there may be issues related to generalisability. It is more difficult to make claims for wider generalisability when using a single organisation, however in this instance an argument has been put forward as to how the organisation makeup is representative of other Local Authorities, this may partially mitigate against this. Therefore it may still be possible to generalise the findings from this case outside of the confines of GMBC to other Local Authorities, and possibly to wider public sector organisations. However, this is as far as the potential generalisability can be taken given the approach taken to the research. Another supporting factor is that GMBC were not selected on the basis of being a unique or extreme case (Bryman, 2004) which would have limited the potential scope for generalisability further.

A methods-related issue arose during the initial data analysis as it became obvious that some of the respondents had misread the question on the average absence rate for their team. Whilst appropriate adjustments were made to the survey responses to account for this, this does need to be acknowledged as a possible limitation. Further replications of this survey in future research would be amended to try to prevent any confusion by the respondents.

Due to the need for anonymity on the survey responses, it was not possible to match the survey responses with actual absence data for each department and team. It was necessary to ask the FLMs to report the levels of absence for their group of subordinates, which may be open to some errors. However, this is acknowledged as a general issue in absence management research (Nicholson, 1977 and Durand, 1985).

Overall, the response rate of 44.5% was disappointing; however this was likely to be affected by the sensitive nature of the topic, rather than simply poor questionnaire design. In addition, due to the limited space available in the survey booklet, some potentially useful variables could not be included. A decision was taken to ensure that the areas surrounding the key hypotheses were focused on in the survey, which meant that indirectly associated variables could not be included. This would have covered issues such as gathering additional personal characteristics such as; marital status, ethnic origin, existence of caring responsibilities, and the pattern of work of the FLMs (full time, part time, flexible working, night shifts).

This survey has focused on the views of FLMs in order to be able to address the research question and meet the objectives of the study. However, it is acknowledged that this provides only one perspective of the way that absence is perceived in the organisation. There are also some general limitations surrounding the use of only one source of primary data within this research. This is recognised as a potential limitation of this work; however the chosen approach was considered to be the most suitable in answering the research question which guides this study, which Johns (2003) believes is crucial in guiding the research strategy and methods employed. In addition the current theory base confirms that a number of other studies in this area have employed one research method, for example; Burdorf et al. (1996); de Vroome (2006);

Harrison and Price (2003); Labriola and Lund (2007) and Roelen et al. (2008). The use of this approach by other researchers suggests that the research strategy employed for this Doctoral research is acceptable, though the researchers' future research in this area may employ a wider variety of research strategies.

Whilst alternative perspectives could have contributed a wider evidence base, it was felt that they would not have been able to 'identify the characteristics of the FLMs' which was the main focus of this research. The alternative perspectives that could have been gained from using a wider range of sources of primary data are acknowledged within the discussion of areas for future study.

7.6. Areas for future research

Whilst this study has bridged the gap between work on absence and the role of FLMs, it has also highlighted the need for additional research in some associated areas. This study has deliberately focused on the perspectives of FLMs as it is their characteristics in effectively managing absence which provides the main contribution of this work.

Future work might include a corresponding questionnaire to employees to gain their perspective of how their FLMs manage absence. This would allow information to be gained on issues such as the quality of return-to-work interviews which is an important issue (Arnott and Emmerson, 2001) that has yet to be investigated sufficiently. In addition, this would enable researchers to capture information on variables such as their perceptions of the management style utilised by their FLM. Investigating the perceptions of different stakeholders may also provide the opportunity to utilise a different range of research methods to ensure that the new research questions can be answered,

Due to the number and breadth of hypotheses and variables covered within this research, using one organisation was the most practicable approach. The value of the findings could be extended further by replicating this research across other organisations in the public sector. Research in this area could be further extended through the use of a comparative study where the practices in different organisations could be contrasted.

A comparative study between the UK public and private sectors could also add a useful dimension, particularly when the most frequently cited academic studies which examine differences between absence management between sectors are now quite out-dated (Wooden, 1990 and Vandenheuvel, 1994) and perhaps do not reflect recent changes in public sector work practices. Data collected from cross-sector research would also contribute to wider HRM research debates surrounding the differences in people management practices.

8. Appendices

Appendix One	Informed consent form: Organisational consent from GMBC
Appendix Two	Scores for GMBC's absence policies and procedures
Appendix Three	Scores of GMBC's associated HR policies and procedures
Appendix Four	Covering letter distributed with paper based surveys
Appendix Five	Survey completed by FLM respondents
Appendix Six	Questionnaire results: Descriptive statistics
Appendix Seven	Responses to Question E1 on questionnaire
Appendix Eight	Cultural aspects of sickness absence identified by Reijenga (2006)
Appendix Nine	Recommendations from Ritchie et al. (2005) on desirable features of absence recording systems
Appendix Ten	Peer-reviewed work created and disseminated by the author on the subject of absence management

Appendix One - Informed consent form



Newcastle Business School

RESEARCH ORGANISATION INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Newcastle Business School

University of Northumbria

Completion of this form is required whenever research is being undertaken by NBS staff or students within any organisation. This applies to research that is carried out on the premises, or is about an organisation, or members of that organisation or its customers, as specifically targeted as subjects of research.

The researcher must supply an explanation to inform the organisation of the purpose of the study, who is carrying out the study, and who will eventually have access to the results. In particular issues of anonymity and avenues of dissemination and publications of the findings should be brought to the organisations' attention.

Researcher's Statement:

The research title for this work is: The role of line managers in effectively managing absence in the public sector.

This research is being carried out to fulfil the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) research degree. All of the research will be carried out by Fiona Robson (PHD student and Graduate Tutor at Newcastle Business School).

All responses to questionnaires and line managers focus groups / interviews will be anonymised so that employees can not be identified either directly or indirectly. It is however acknowledged that it will not be possible to anonymise the findings of the interview with the Head of Personnel because of the nature of the role (i.e. there is only one in Gateshead).

The PHD supervision team which is led by Dr Sharon Mavin (Associate Dean Research) will have access to all of the work-in-progress during regular supervision meetings. Upon completion of this research, the final thesis will be seen by the relevant University administrators as well as the panel of internal and external examiners.

In addition to the publication of the final thesis, aspects of this work should generate papers for academic conferences, and will hopefully lead to publication within appropriate academic journals. It is also hoped that it may also be possible to disseminate this research via practitioner audiences. With the permission of the organisation, the researcher would like to be able to name the organisation within the conferences and publications. It is also envisaged that some of the findings of the research and methodologies used will be utilised to inform research led teaching within Newcastle Business School.

Any organisation manager or representative who is empowered to give consent may do so here:

Name: Jeff Dean
Position/Title: Head of Personnel
Organisation Name: Gateshead Council
Location: Human Resources, Gateshead Civic Centre,
Gateshead NE8 1HH

Anonymity must be offered to the organisation if it does not wish to be identified in the research report. Confidentiality is more complex and cannot extend to the markers of student work or the reviewers of staff work, but can apply to the published outcomes. If confidentiality is required, what form applies?

☒ No confidentiality required

☐ Masking of organisation name in research report

☐ No publication of the research report

(Subject to protection of any sensitive personal data and other Data Protection requirements. Specific approval may also be required from partner organisations)

Signature: jeffdean@gateshead.gov.uk Date: 26 January 2006

This form can be signed via email if the accompanying email is attached with the signer's personal email address included. The form cannot be completed by phone, rather should be handled via post.

Appendix Two - Scores for absence management policies and procedures

	Absence Management Procedure	Employee Counselling guidance	Frequent sickness absence procedure	Well-being at work policy	Stress policy	Ill-health retirement policy	Reporting sickness absence procedure
Are the policy objectives clear?	X	n/a	X	✓	✓	X	✓
Is it written in a way which employees can easily understand?	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓
Are the actions that will take place when a trigger point is reached clear?	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Are definitions provided for any technical terms?	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	n/a	X
Are the roles of all of the key players defined?	X	n/a	✓	X	X	n/a	X
Is there an emphasis on senior management commitment?	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓
Is the role of Occupational Health clear?	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Are the procedures that absent employees must follow clear?	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X
Are there details of the return-to-work support mechanisms?	✓	n/a	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Is it clear how the organisation will contact and deal with absent employees?	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X
Is there a distinction made between long term and short term absences?	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X
Are the causes of absence taken into account before action is taken?	X	n/a	X	X	X	X	✓
Are the trigger points clear?	X	n/a	X	X	X	X	✓
Are the rules for certification clear?	X	n/a	✓	X	X	X	✓
Is there a provision for absences which may be covered by the DDA?	✓	n/a	X	X	X	✓	✓
Are the arrangements for contractual sick pay clear?	✓	n/a	X	X	X	✓	✓
Are the arrangements for statutory sick pay clear?	✓	n/a	✓	X	X	X	X
Is it clear that disciplinary sanctions / dismissal is ultimately a possibility?	✓	n/a	✓	X	X	X	X
Is there any indication that the organisation wants to proactively improve health?	✓	n/a	X	X	X	✓	X
Are there any contact numbers available for further advice and support?	X	n/a	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Is the tone of the policy supportive to employees who are genuinely ill?	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X

Appendix Three - Scores of GMBC's associated HR policies and procedures

	Is there a clear link to the absence policy?	Is there clarity in the roles and responsibilities?	Is the role of FLMs clear?	Is senior management commitment implicit?	Is it written in an accessible format?
Recruitment and Selection	x	✓	x	✓	✓
Health and Safety	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Discipline and Grievance	x	✓	✓	✓	Yes, though it is quite technical in parts
Equal Opportunities	x	✓	✓	✓	Yes, though it is quite technical in parts
Work-life balance	x	x	x	✓	✓
Flexible working	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Homeworking	x	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job sharing	✓	x	x	✓	✓
Training and Development	✓	x	x	✓	✓
Performance Management	x	✓	✓	✓	✓

Appendix Four - Covering letter distributed with paper surveys

Managing sickness absence questionnaire:

Gaining the opinions of line managers

Newcastle Business School



8th May 2007

Dear Sir / Madam

Managing absence questionnaire

Further to my recent email, I am writing to you to ask you to complete the attached questionnaire on managing absence. Your views, as a line manager at Gateshead Council are very important to this study.

My name is Fiona Robson and I am a Graduate Tutor and Doctoral candidate at Newcastle Business School. My PhD research is on the subject of absence in the public sector and particularly the role of line managers. This questionnaire forms a large part of my research into sickness absence in the public sector and will allow me to explore some of the reasons behind absence at Gateshead Council.

As you may already be aware, the Council is currently involved in an exciting research project looking at absence as part of a Sickness Absence Consortium with other Councils from the North of England. I have also been involved in this research and have worked closely with Gateshead and the other Councils. The results from this PhD study will further enhance the work of the Absence Consortium and contribute to their overall conclusions and recommendations.

The main part of this study involves asking all first line managers in the Central Services and Community Based Services Directorates to complete the attached questionnaire. It should take you approximately ten minutes to answer the questions and your responses will be extremely valuable to my Doctoral research.

Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous so that it is not possible to identify any individual either directly or indirectly. As a member of staff at Newcastle Business School I am bound by a strict code of ethics to ensure that your responses are dealt with appropriately. You will notice that you have not been asked to provide your name, job title or employee number anywhere on the questionnaire.

In addition to supporting my research, these findings will be used to develop a greater understanding of absence management, and to enable the Council to identify ways of improving and encouraging high levels of attendance.

What should you do now?

Please complete the attached questionnaire and return it in the attached pre-paid envelope. I would be grateful if you could do this before Friday 25th May.

I have tried to answer some of the most frequently asked questions overleaf. However, if you would like any additional information on this project, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at f.robson@northumbria.ac.uk or by phone on 0191 2437656.

Thank you for your help.

Fiona Robson

Managing sickness absence questionnaire:

Gaining the opinions of line managers

8th May 2007

Frequently Asked Questions:

Will anybody be able to guess which questionnaire I filled in?

You are not asked to give your name or employee number on the questionnaire. In addition, all of the questionnaire responses will be analysed independently by myself at Newcastle Business School. The findings will be reported back to the Council in a format which is useful for them i.e. percentages and frequencies. No-one will have access to any of the individual questionnaires. For further information on the University's ethics policy you can visit our website:

<http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/ethicspolicy.doc>

Will my manager / someone from the HR Department read my response?

No, your completed questionnaire should be returned to me directly using the pre-paid envelope.

What will happen to the data gathered in this research?

The key purpose of this data is for the Doctoral research. In addition some of the results may be used to support work that comes from the thesis. This may include articles written for publications. As mentioned above, you are not asked to give any identifying information so you don't have to worry about this.

At the end of the research a full copy of the report will be provided to the organisation alongside some recommendations for how absence may be reduced or managed in a different way. In addition the conclusions of this research will be fed back to the Absence Consortium to add value to their work and to enhance the recommendations made at the end of the project.

What if I don't want to / can't answer one of the questions?

Ideally I would like you to complete all of the questions, however if there are some questions that you would prefer not to answer that is fine, I will still be able to use your responses from the other questions.

Will I be able to see the results?

A summary of the report will be made available to all participants at the end of this project.

Appendix Five - Paper based survey completed by FLM respondents

Absence questionnaire

Please indicate your answers to the questions by ticking the most appropriate box (unless guided otherwise).

Section A. Your role in Gateshead Council

- 1) Which area do you work in? Central Services ☐
Community Based Services ☐
Other ☐
- 2) Which Department are you based in? **Central Services**
Chief Executive's ☐
Finance and ICT ☐
Legal and Corporate Services ☐
Other ☐
Community Based Services
Housing Management ☐
Services for Older People ☐
Services for Adults with ☐
Disabilities ☐
Community Support ☐
Planning, Performance and ☐
Support ☐
Cultural Services ☐
Other ☐
- 3) Please state which sub-department you work in. e.g. Supported Housing
- 4) Please state how many years you have years worked in your **current role**.
- 5) Have you previously worked in a non- Yes ☐
management role at Gateshead No ☐
Council?

If yes, did you work in the same department that you are in now?
Yes ☐
No ☐
- 6) Please state how many days absence days you have had in the last year.
- 7) How many times have you been absent times in the last year?

Section B. Absence in your team

(Please write in the appropriate number for the following three questions).

- 1) How many staff are you responsible for? ____
- 2) Approx how many of these staff are part-time? ____
- 3) Over the last year what is the average number of days absence for your team? ____

Section C. Your role in managing absence at Gateshead Council

- 1) Please indicate who has responsibility for the following areas of absence management.

(Please tick the appropriate box, you may choose more than one)

	You	Your line manager	HR Dept	Senior managers	Trade Unions	Occ Health
Ensuring that the Disability Discrimination Act is adhered to.						
Monitoring absence levels across Directorates.						
Ensuring that the absence policy is followed.						
Making sure that all employees are aware of the council's policy.						
Analysing departmental absence records						
Ensuring that employees understand the impact of absence on the Council.						
Monitoring individual absence records						
Identifying when a trigger point has been reached.						
Carrying out return-to-work interviews						
Managing persistent short term absences						
Managing long term absences						
Encouraging good attendance						
Treating all employees fairly						
Advising first line managers on complex cases						
Initiating advice from Occupational Health						

- 2) Do you carry out return-to-work interviews after every absence in your team?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If No, please give the main reason.....

3) Do you carry out sickness counselling interviews whenever an employee hits a trigger point?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If No, please give the main reason.....

4) Do you regularly monitor the absence levels of your team?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If No, please give the main reason.....

5) Are there any things which prevent you from carrying out your duties in relation to managing absence?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, please give details

6) How would you rate the support you receive from the following parties in managing absence cases?

	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Your immediate manager			
Senior Management			
HR Department			

How would you rate your knowledge of the following HR policies, and your confidence in applying them within your team?

Name of Policy	Knowledge of policy			Confidence in applying the policy.		
	Very knowledgeable	Reasonably knowledgeable	Not very knowledgeable	Very confident	Reasonably confident	Not very confident
Equal Opportunities						
Work-life balance						
Recruitment and Selection						
Flexible working						
Performance Management						

Section D. General work attitudes

- 1) Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements, using the key shown.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel very little loyalty to this Council.					
I would accept almost any type of job assignment to continue working for this Council					
I find that my values and the Council's values are very similar.					
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this Council.					
I could just as well be working for another Council					
It would take very little change in my personal circumstances to cause me to leave this Council.					
Often I find it difficult to agree with this Council's policies on employee matters					
Deciding to work for this Council was definitely a mistake on my part.					
I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do					
My manager is quite competent in doing his/her job					
I like the people I work with					
There is really too little chance for promotion in my job					
When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.					
Communication seems good within this Council					
Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted					
My manager is unfair to me					
The goals of this Council are not clear to me.					
I find I have to work harder at my job because of incompetence of the people I work with					
I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated					

Section E. Your role as a manager at Gateshead Council.

- 1) Please give four words that you think describes your management style when you are managing the absence of your staff. For example: fair, strict, helpful

(i)_____ (ii)_____ (iii)_____ (iv)_____

- 2) Thinking about your general management style, please indicate how often you think you engage in the following behaviours.

	Always	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Making my attitudes clear to the group					
Put suggestions made by the group into operation					
Finding time to listen to group members					
Criticising poor work					
Speaking in a manner not to be questioned					
Looking out for the personal welfare of individual group members					
Keeping the group well informed					
Treating group members as if they are my equals					
Get what I ask for from my superiors					
Ask that group members follow standard rules					
Making group members feel at ease when I am talking to them.					
Letting group members know what is expected of them.					
Maintaining definite standards of performance					
Refusing to explain my actions					

Section F. Thinking about your role in managing absence.

- 1) Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel confident in applying the absence policy when members of my team have been absent.					
I have a clear understanding of the Council's absence management policy.					
I am unsure as to what role HR play in the managing absence process					
I am clear about which parts of absence management I am responsible for.					
I do not always know how to deal with absence cases.					
I have all the support I need to be able to carry out my people management duties.					
I am not very knowledgeable about the Council's HR policies.					
Absent employees are treated quite harshly by the Council's procedures.					
Senior Managers have communicated the importance of managing absence to me.					
Managing absence is an important part of my daily routine.					
All absences in my team are recorded on a daily basis.					
I do not have enough time to be proactive in trying to reduce absence.					
Line managers are not the best people to be in charge of managing absence.					
I have enough time in my normal working day to manage absence.					
My performance in managing absence is judged by my manager.					

1)	Gender:	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
2)	Age:	21 or under	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		22-29	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		30-39	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		40-49	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		50-59	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		60 or over	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3)	Total length of service:	Under one year	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		1-3 years	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		4-6 years	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		7-9 years	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		10 years or more	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4)	Please indicate your current job grade:	Craft worker	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		Grade A-D	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		Scale 4-6	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		SO1 to PO3	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		PO4 to PO10	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		Other	<input type="checkbox"/>		

--

289

Appendix Six - Descriptive statistics from survey to FLMs

Q. Which division do you work in?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Central Services	9	10.1	10.2	10.2
	Community Based Services	77	86.5	87.5	97.7
	2	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Which Department do you work in?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Finance and ICT	3	3.4	3.4	3.4
	Legal and Corporate Services	7	7.9	8.0	11.5
	Other - Central Services	1	1.1	1.1	12.6
	Housing Management	3	3.4	3.4	16.1
	Services for Older People	29	32.6	33.3	49.4
	Services for Adults with Disabilities	15	16.9	17.2	66.7
	Community Support	2	2.2	2.3	69.0
	Planning, Performance and Support	7	7.9	8.0	77.0
	Cultural Services	17	19.1	19.5	96.6
	Other - CBS	1	1.1	1.1	97.7
	11	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Which sub-division do you work in?

Which sub-department do you work in?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid -	2	2.2	2.2	2.2
999	26	29.2	29.2	31.5
Arts DEvelopment	1	1.1	1.1	32.6
Asylum Team	1	1.1	1.1	33.7
Care Call	1	1.1	1.1	34.8
Care call*	2	2.2	2.2	37.1
Commisioning	1	1.1	1.1	38.2
Community health	1	1.1	1.1	39.3
Day Opportunities	1	1.1	1.1	40.4
development	1	1.1	1.1	41.6
Domiciliary Care	7	7.9	7.9	49.4
Financial Management	2	2.2	2.2	51.7
head of service	1	1.1	1.1	52.8
HR/OD	1	1.1	1.1	53.9
Human Resources	4	4.5	4.5	58.4
Independent supported living	1	1.1	1.1	59.6
Learning and Children - Business Support Service	1	1.1	1.1	60.7
Learning Disabilities	3	3.4	3.4	64.0
Leisure	2	2.2	2.2	66.3
Libraries	2	2.2	2.2	68.5
Libraries & Arts	2	2.2	2.2	70.8
Litigation	1	1.1	1.1	71.9
MentalHealth/Learning Disties	2	2.2	2.2	74.2
Neighbourhood Management	1	1.1	1.1	75.3
Older People	1	1.1	1.1	76.4
older people mental health	1	1.1	1.1	77.5
Performance Management & ICT	1	1.1	1.1	78.7
Planning and development	1	1.1	1.1	79.8
Planning and Development	1	1.1	1.1	80.9
Provider Services	1	1.1	1.1	82.0
Resources and Commissioning	1	1.1	1.1	83.1
School ICT Support	1	1.1	1.1	84.3
Sport & Leisure	1	1.1	1.1	85.4
Sport and Leisure	3	3.4	3.4	88.8
Sport/Leisure	3	3.4	3.4	92.1
Strategic housing	1	1.1	1.1	93.3
Supported Independent Living	1	1.1	1.1	94.4
Tourism	1	1.1	1.1	95.5
Training & Development	2	2.2	2.2	97.8
Training and Development	1	1.1	1.1	98.9
Tyne & Wear Archives	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Q. How many years have you worked in your current role?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	1	1	1.1	1.1	2.3
	1	1	1.1	1.1	3.4
	1	5	5.6	5.7	9.2
	2	1	1.1	1.1	10.3
	2	1	1.1	1.1	11.5
	2	8	9.0	9.2	20.7
	3	2	2.2	2.3	23.0
	3	20	22.5	23.0	46.0
	4	10	11.2	11.5	57.5
	5	2	2.2	2.3	59.8
	5	8	9.0	9.2	69.0
	6	3	3.4	3.4	72.4
	7	4	4.5	4.6	77.0
	8	3	3.4	3.4	80.5
	9	1	1.1	1.1	81.6
	10	1	1.1	1.1	82.8
	12	1	1.1	1.1	83.9
	13	1	1.1	1.1	85.1
	14	2	2.2	2.3	87.4
	15	2	2.2	2.3	89.7
	16	1	1.1	1.1	90.8
	17	1	1.1	1.1	92.0
	18	1	1.1	1.1	93.1
	20	1	1.1	1.1	94.3
	23	2	2.2	2.3	96.6
	24	1	1.1	1.1	97.7
	26	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
Total		87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Have you previously worked in a non-management role at Gateshead Council?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	61	68.5	69.3	69.3
	No	27	30.3	30.7	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. If yes, did you work in the same department that you now work in?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	40	44.9	93.0	93.0
	no	3	3.4	7.0	100.0
	Total	43	48.3	100.0	
Missing	888	29	32.6		
	System	17	19.1		
	Total	46	51.7		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please state how many days absence you have had in the last year.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	39	43.8	43.8	43.8
	1	6	6.7	6.7	50.6
	2	7	7.9	7.9	58.4
	3	6	6.7	6.7	65.2
	4	8	9.0	9.0	74.2
	5	2	2.2	2.2	76.4
	6	3	3.4	3.4	79.8
	7	2	2.2	2.2	82.0
	10	3	3.4	3.4	85.4
	13	1	1.1	1.1	86.5
	14	2	2.2	2.2	88.8
	15	1	1.1	1.1	89.9
	21	1	1.1	1.1	91.0
	26	1	1.1	1.1	92.1
	29	1	1.1	1.1	93.3
	40	1	1.1	1.1	94.4
	56	1	1.1	1.1	95.5
	65	1	1.1	1.1	96.6
	70	1	1.1	1.1	97.8
	142	1	1.1	1.1	98.9
	222	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Q. How many times have you been absent in the last year?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	38	42.7	42.7	42.7
	1	29	32.6	32.6	75.3
	2	12	13.5	13.5	88.8
	3	4	4.5	4.5	93.3
	4	3	3.4	3.4	96.6
	6	1	1.1	1.1	97.8
	7	1	1.1	1.1	98.9
	15	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Q. How many staff are you responsible for?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	3	3.4	3.5	3.5
	2	4	4.5	4.7	8.1
	3	2	2.2	2.3	10.5
	4	3	3.4	3.5	14.0
	5	5	5.6	5.8	19.8
	6	2	2.2	2.3	22.1
	7	4	4.5	4.7	26.7
	8	4	4.5	4.7	31.4
	9	5	5.6	5.8	37.2
	10	3	3.4	3.5	40.7
	11	1	1.1	1.2	41.9
	13	3	3.4	3.5	45.3
	14	3	3.4	3.5	48.8
	15	2	2.2	2.3	51.2
	16	2	2.2	2.3	53.5
	17	1	1.1	1.2	54.7
	19	1	1.1	1.2	55.8
	20	7	7.9	8.1	64.0
	22	2	2.2	2.3	66.3
	24	2	2.2	2.3	68.6
	25	4	4.5	4.7	73.3
	28	1	1.1	1.2	74.4
	35	2	2.2	2.3	76.7
	40	4	4.5	4.7	81.4
	45	1	1.1	1.2	82.6
	47	1	1.1	1.2	83.7
	56	4	4.5	4.7	88.4
	60	4	4.5	4.7	93.0
	72	1	1.1	1.2	94.2
	80	1	1.1	1.2	95.3
	82	1	1.1	1.2	96.5
	120	2	2.2	2.3	98.8
	800	1	1.1	1.2	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
	System	1	1.1		
	Total	3	3.4		

Q. Approx how many of these staff are part time?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	14	15.7	16.3	16.3
	1	12	13.5	14.0	30.2
	2	10	11.2	11.6	41.9
	3	5	5.6	5.8	47.7
	4	5	5.6	5.8	53.5
	5	3	3.4	3.5	57.0
	6	3	3.4	3.5	60.5
	7	3	3.4	3.5	64.0
	8	5	5.6	5.8	69.8
	10	3	3.4	3.5	73.3
	12	1	1.1	1.2	74.4
	13	1	1.1	1.2	75.6
	14	2	2.2	2.3	77.9
	16	1	1.1	1.2	79.1
	18	1	1.1	1.2	80.2
	20	1	1.1	1.2	81.4
	25	1	1.1	1.2	82.6
	33	2	2.2	2.3	84.9
	36	1	1.1	1.2	86.0
	37	1	1.1	1.2	87.2
	42	1	1.1	1.2	88.4
	44	1	1.1	1.2	89.5
	47	1	1.1	1.2	90.7
	50	2	2.2	2.3	93.0
	54	2	2.2	2.3	95.3
	58	2	2.2	2.3	97.7
	60	1	1.1	1.2	98.8
	600	1	1.1	1.2	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	999	3	3.4		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Over the last year what is the average number of days absence for your team?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	3	3.4	4.4	4.4
	0	1	1.1	1.5	5.9
	1	1	1.1	1.5	7.4
	1	1	1.1	1.5	8.8
	2	7	7.9	10.3	19.1
	2	3	3.4	4.4	23.5
	3	1	1.1	1.5	25.0
	4	1	1.1	1.5	26.5
	4	1	1.1	1.5	27.9
	5	3	3.4	4.4	32.4
	6	5	5.6	7.4	39.7
	6	1	1.1	1.5	41.2
	7	4	4.5	5.9	47.1
	8	1	1.1	1.5	48.5
	9	2	2.2	2.9	51.5
	9	1	1.1	1.5	52.9
	11	1	1.1	1.5	54.4
	13	1	1.1	1.5	55.9
	14	1	1.1	1.5	57.4
	20	5	5.6	7.4	64.7
	23	1	1.1	1.5	66.2
	24	1	1.1	1.5	67.6
	27	1	1.1	1.5	69.1
	30	2	2.2	2.9	72.1
	36	1	1.1	1.5	73.5
	37	1	1.1	1.5	75.0
	56	1	1.1	1.5	76.5
	68	1	1.1	1.5	77.9
	70	2	2.2	2.9	80.9
	72	1	1.1	1.5	82.4
	150	2	2.2	2.9	85.3
	180	4	4.5	5.9	91.2
	200	1	1.1	1.5	92.6

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Ensuring that the Disability Discrimination Act is adhered to

You

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	65	73.0	76.5	76.5
	NO	20	22.5	23.5	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Your line manager

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	55	61.8	64.7	64.7
	NO	30	33.7	35.3	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	56	62.9	68.3	68.3
	NO	26	29.2	31.7	100.0
	Total	82	92.1	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
	System	3	3.4		
	Total	7	7.9		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior Managers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	40	44.9	47.1	47.1
	NO	45	50.6	52.9	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Unions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	27	30.3	31.8	31.8
	NO	58	65.2	68.2	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	29	32.6	34.1	34.1
	NO	56	62.9	65.9	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Monitoring absence levels across Directorates

You**Monitoring absence levels across Directorates**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	14	15.7	16.5	16.5
	NO	71	79.8	83.5	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Your line manager

C1.2_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	21	23.6	24.7	24.7
	NO	64	71.9	75.3	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.2_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	57	64.0	67.1	67.1
	NO	28	31.5	32.9	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior Management

C1.2_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	48	53.9	55.8	55.8
	NO	37	41.6	43.0	98.8
	99	1	1.1	1.2	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	999	3	3.4		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.2_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	3	3.4	3.5	3.5
	NO	82	92.1	96.5	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.2_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	9	10.1	10.6	10.6
	NO	76	85.4	89.4	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Ensuring that the absence policy is followed

You

Ensuring that the absence policy is followed

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	84	94.4	95.5	95.5
	NO	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Line manager

C1.3_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	57	64.0	64.8	64.8
	NO	31	34.8	35.2	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.3_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	43	48.3	48.9	48.9
	NO	45	50.6	51.1	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior management

C1.3_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	31	34.8	35.2	35.2
	NO	57	64.0	64.8	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.3_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	13	14.6	14.8	14.8
	NO	75	84.3	85.2	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.3_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	18	20.2	20.5	20.5
	NO	70	78.7	79.5	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Making sure that all employees are aware of the Council's policy

You

Making sure that all employees are aware of the Council's policy

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	80	89.9	92.0	92.0
	NO	7	7.9	8.0	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Line manager

C1.4_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	40	44.9	46.0	46.0
	NO	47	52.8	54.0	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.4_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	41	46.1	47.1	47.1
	NO	46	51.7	52.9	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior management

C1.4_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	37	41.6	42.5	42.5
	NO	50	56.2	57.5	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.4_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	14	15.7	16.1	16.1
	NO	73	82.0	83.9	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.4_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	9	10.1	10.3	10.3
	NO	78	87.6	89.7	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Analysing departmental absence records

You

Analysing departmental absence records

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	31	34.8	36.5	36.5
	NO	54	60.7	63.5	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Line manager

C1.5_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	42	47.2	49.4	49.4
	NO	43	48.3	50.6	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.5_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	53	59.6	61.6	61.6
	NO	33	37.1	38.4	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	999	3	3.4		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior management

C1.5_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	41	46.1	48.2	48.2
	NO	44	49.4	51.8	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.5_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	3	3.4	3.5	3.5
	NO	82	92.1	96.5	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.5_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	5	5.6	5.9	5.9
	NO	80	89.9	94.1	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Ensuring that employees understand the impact of absence on the Council

You

Ensuring that employees understand the impact of absence on the Council

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	81	91.0	92.0	92.0
	NO	7	7.9	8.0	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Line manager

C1.6_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	63	70.8	71.6	71.6
	NO	25	28.1	28.4	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.6_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	39	43.8	44.3	44.3
	NO	49	55.1	55.7	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior management

C1.6_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	46	51.7	52.3	52.3
	NO	42	47.2	47.7	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.6_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	17	19.1	19.3	19.3
	NO	71	79.8	80.7	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.6_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	12	13.5	13.6	13.6
	NO	76	85.4	86.4	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Monitoring individual absence records

You

Monitoring individual absence records

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	75	84.3	85.2	85.2
	NO	13	14.6	14.8	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Line manager

C1.7_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	45	50.6	51.1	51.1
	NO	43	48.3	48.9	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.7_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	23	25.8	26.1	26.1
	NO	65	73.0	73.9	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior management

C1.7_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	15	16.9	17.0	17.0
	NO	73	82.0	83.0	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.7_TU

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid NO	88	98.9	100.0	100.0
Missing 999	1	1.1		
Total	89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.7_OH

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid YES	3	3.4	3.4	3.4
NO	85	95.5	96.6	100.0
Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing 999	1	1.1		
Total	89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Identifying when a trigger point has been reached

You

Identifying when a trigger point has been reached

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid YES	56	62.9	63.6	63.6
NO	32	36.0	36.4	100.0
Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing 999	1	1.1		
Total	89	100.0		

Line manager

C1.8_LM

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid YES	34	38.2	38.6	38.6
NO	54	60.7	61.4	100.0
Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing 999	1	1.1		
Total	89	100.0		

HR

C1.8_HR

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid YES	48	53.9	54.5	54.5
NO	40	44.9	45.5	100.0
Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing 999	1	1.1		
Total	89	100.0		

Senior management

C1.8_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	13	14.6	14.8	14.8
	NO	75	84.3	85.2	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.8_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	NO	87	97.8	98.9	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.8_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	2	2.2	2.3	2.3
	NO	86	96.6	97.7	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Carrying out return-to-work interviews

You

Carrying out return to work interviews

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	86	96.6	98.9	98.9
	NO	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Line manager

C1.9_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	32	36.0	36.8	36.8
	NO	55	61.8	63.2	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

HR**C1.9_HR**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	5	5.6	5.7	5.7
	NO	82	92.1	94.3	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior management**C1.9_SM**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	11	12.4	12.6	12.6
	NO	76	85.4	87.4	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union**C1.9_TU**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NO	87	97.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational health**C1.9_OH**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	NO	86	96.6	98.9	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Managing persistent short term absences

You

Managing persistent short term absences

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	77	86.5	87.5	87.5
	NO	11	12.4	12.5	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Line managers

C1.10_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	48	53.9	54.5	54.5
	NO	40	44.9	45.5	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.10_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	20	22.5	22.7	22.7
	NO	68	76.4	77.3	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior management

C1.10_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	15	16.9	17.0	17.0
	NO	73	82.0	83.0	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.10_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	NO	87	97.8	98.9	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.10_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	8	9.0	9.1	9.1
	NO	80	89.9	90.9	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Managing long term absences

You

Managing long term absences

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	71	79.8	80.7	80.7
	NO	17	19.1	19.3	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Line manager

C1.11_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	56	62.9	63.6	63.6
	NO	32	36.0	36.4	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.11_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	40	44.9	45.5	45.5
	NO	48	53.9	54.5	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior management

C1.11_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	27	30.3	30.7	30.7
	NO	61	68.5	69.3	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.11_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	6	6.7	6.8	6.8
	NO	82	92.1	93.2	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.11_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	25	28.1	28.4	28.4
	NO	63	70.8	71.6	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Encouraging good attendance

You

Encouraging good attendance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	84	94.4	96.6	96.6
	NO	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Line manager

C1.12_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	43	48.3	49.4	49.4
	NO	44	49.4	50.6	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.12_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	23	25.8	26.4	26.4
	NO	64	71.9	73.6	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior management

C1.12_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	31	34.8	35.6	35.6
	NO	56	62.9	64.4	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.12_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	5	5.6	5.7	5.7
	NO	82	92.1	94.3	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.12_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	6	6.7	6.9	6.9
	NO	81	91.0	93.1	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	999	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Treating all employees fairly

You

Treating all employees fairly

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	84	94.4	100.0	100.0
Missing	999	5	5.6		
Total		89	100.0		

Line managers

C1.13_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	53	59.6	63.1	63.1
	NO	31	34.8	36.9	100.0
	Total	84	94.4	100.0	
Missing	999	5	5.6		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.13_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	49	55.1	58.3	58.3
	NO	35	39.3	41.7	100.0
	Total	84	94.4	100.0	
Missing	999	5	5.6		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior Management

C1.13_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	47	52.8	56.0	56.0
	NO	37	41.6	44.0	100.0
	Total	84	94.4	100.0	
Missing	999	5	5.6		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.13_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	33	37.1	39.3	39.3
	NO	51	57.3	60.7	100.0
	Total	84	94.4	100.0	
Missing	999	5	5.6		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.13_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	28	31.5	33.3	33.3
	NO	56	62.9	66.7	100.0
	Total	84	94.4	100.0	
Missing	999	5	5.6		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Advising first line managers on complex cases

You

Advising first line managers on complex cases

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	44	49.4	52.4	52.4
	NO	40	44.9	47.6	100.0
	Total	84	94.4	100.0	
Missing	999	5	5.6		
Total		89	100.0		

Line managers

C1.14_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	32	36.0	37.6	37.6
	NO	53	59.6	62.4	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.14_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	46	51.7	54.1	54.1
	NO	39	43.8	45.9	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior Management

C1.14_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	19	21.3	22.4	22.4
	NO	66	74.2	77.6	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.14_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	7	7.9	8.2	8.2
	NO	78	87.6	91.8	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.14_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	17	19.1	20.0	20.0
	NO	68	76.4	80.0	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate who you believe has responsibility for: Initiating advice from Occupational Health

You

Initiating advice from Occupational Health

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	66	74.2	75.0	75.0
	NO	22	24.7	25.0	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Your line manager

C1.15_LM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	51	57.3	58.0	58.0
	NO	37	41.6	42.0	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

HR

C1.15_HR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	21	23.6	23.9	23.9
	NO	67	75.3	76.1	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior Management

C1.15_SM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	14	15.7	15.9	15.9
	NO	74	83.1	84.1	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Trade Union

C1.15_TU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	2	2.2	2.3	2.3
	NO	86	96.6	97.7	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Occupational Health

C1.15_OH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	17	19.1	19.3	19.3
	NO	71	79.8	80.7	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Do you carry out return-to-work interviews after every absence in your team?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	85	95.5	95.5	95.5
	no	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Q. If not, why?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	My line manager carries out this task	3	3.4	60.0	60.0
	Senior management carry out this task	1	1.1	20.0	80.0
	Unaware of organisational procedures	1	1.1	20.0	100.0
	Total	5	5.6	100.0	
Missing	888	84	94.4		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Do you carry out sickness counselling interviews whenever an employee hits a trigger point?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	64	71.9	71.9	71.9
	no	25	28.1	28.1	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Q. If not, why?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	My line manager carries out this task	17	19.1	85.0	85.0
	Senior management carry out this task	1	1.1	5.0	90.0
	Because absence is not a big problem in my team	1	1.1	5.0	95.0
	The situation has never arisen	1	1.1	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	22.5	100.0	
Missing	888	66	74.2		
	999	3	3.4		
	Total	69	77.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Do you regularly monitor the absence levels of your team?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	74	83.1	83.1	83.1
	no	15	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Q. If no, please give the main reason

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	My line manager carries out this task	6	6.7	50.0	50.0
	HR responsibility	2	2.2	16.7	66.7
	Because absence is not a big problem in my team	1	1.1	8.3	75.0
	Up to date absence data not available	2	2.2	16.7	91.7
	Unaware of organisational procedures	1	1.1	8.3	100.0
	Total	12	13.5	100.0	
Missing	888	76	85.4		
	999	1	1.1		
	Total	77	86.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Are there any things which prevent you from carrying out your duties in relation to managing absence?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	13	14.6	14.6	14.6
	no	76	85.4	85.4	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Q. If yes, please give details.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Insufficient time	1	1.1	9.1	9.1
	Insufficient administrative support	2	2.2	18.2	27.3
	Additional staff cover	2	2.2	18.2	45.5
	Policy is too prescriptive and inflexible	1	1.1	9.1	54.5
	Tardiness of receiving absence data	3	3.4	27.3	81.8
	Ineffective range of WLB policies	1	1.1	9.1	90.9
	Other service priorities	1	1.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	11	12.4	100.0	
Missing	888	76	85.4		
	999	2	2.2		
	Total	78	87.6		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate the support you receive from your immediate manager?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	GOOD	63	70.8	70.8	70.8
	SATISFACTORY	21	23.6	23.6	94.4
	POOR	5	5.6	5.6	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Q. How would you rate the support you receive from senior management?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	GOOD	40	44.9	46.5	46.5
	SATISFACTORY	33	37.1	38.4	84.9
	POOR	13	14.6	15.1	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	999	3	3.4		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate the support you receive from the HR Department?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	GOOD	31	34.8	37.3	37.3
	SATISFACTORY	36	40.4	43.4	80.7
	POOR	16	18.0	19.3	100.0
	Total	83	93.3	100.0	
Missing	999	6	6.7		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate your knowledge of the equal opportunities policy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE	30	33.7	33.7	33.7
	REASONABLY KNOWLEDGEABLE	53	59.6	59.6	93.3
	NOT VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE	6	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Q. How would you rate your knowledge of the work-life balance policy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE	24	27.0	28.2	28.2
	REASONABLY KNOWLEDGEABLE	50	56.2	58.8	87.1
	NOT VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE	11	12.4	12.9	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate your knowledge of the recruitment and selection policy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE	39	43.8	45.3	45.3
	REASONABLY KNOWLEDGEABLE	39	43.8	45.3	90.7
	NOT VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE	8	9.0	9.3	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	3	3.4		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate your knowledge of the flexible working policy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE	34	38.2	39.5	39.5
	REASONABLY KNOWLEDGEABLE	39	43.8	45.3	84.9
	NOT VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE	13	14.6	15.1	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	3	3.4		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate your knowledge of the performance management policy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE	30	33.7	35.3	35.3
	REASONABLY KNOWLEDGEABLE	43	48.3	50.6	85.9
	NOT VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE	12	13.5	14.1	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate your confidence in applying the equal opportunities policy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY CONFIDENT	30	33.7	35.3	35.3
	REASONABLY CONFIDENT	49	55.1	57.6	92.9
	NOT VERY CONFIDENT	6	6.7	7.1	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	3	3.4		
	System	1	1.1		
	Total	4	4.5		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate your confidence in applying the work-life balance policy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY CONFIDENT	25	28.1	29.4	29.4
	REASONABLY CONFIDENT	49	55.1	57.6	87.1
	NOT VERY CONFIDENT	11	12.4	12.9	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
	Total	89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate your confidence in applying the recruitment and selection policy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY CONFIDENT	35	39.3	41.2	41.2
	REASONABLY CONFIDENT	40	44.9	47.1	88.2
	NOT VERY CONFIDENT	10	11.2	11.8	100.0
	Total	85	95.5	100.0	
Missing	999	4	4.5		
	Total	89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate your confidence in applying the flexible working policy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY CONFIDENT	31	34.8	36.9	36.9
	REASONABLY CONFIDENT	38	42.7	45.2	82.1
	NOT VERY CONFIDENT	15	16.9	17.9	100.0
	Total	84	94.4	100.0	
Missing	999	5	5.6		
	Total	89	100.0		

Q. How would you rate your confidence in applying the performance management policy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY CONFIDENT	25	28.1	29.8	29.8
	REASONABLY CONFIDENT	43	48.3	51.2	81.0
	NOT VERY CONFIDENT	16	18.0	19.0	100.0
	Total	84	94.4	100.0	
Missing	999	5	5.6		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I feel very little loyalty to this Council

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	13	14.6	14.6	14.6
	AGREE	4	4.5	4.5	19.1
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	15	16.9	16.9	36.0
	DISAGREE	36	40.4	40.4	76.4
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	21	23.6	23.6	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

would accept almost any type of job assignment to continue working for this Council

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	10	11.2	11.2	11.2
	AGREE	4	4.5	4.5	15.7
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	20	22.5	22.5	38.2
	DISAGREE	34	38.2	38.2	76.4
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	21	23.6	23.6	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

I find that my values and the Council's values are very similar

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	15	16.9	16.9	16.9
	AGREE	37	41.6	41.6	58.4
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	33	37.1	37.1	95.5
	DISAGREE	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

I am proud to tell others that I am part of this Council

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	29	32.6	33.0	33.0
	AGREE	32	36.0	36.4	69.3
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	24	27.0	27.3	96.6
	DISAGREE	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

I could just as well be working for another Council as long as the type of work was similar

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	4	4.5	4.5	4.5
	AGREE	31	34.8	34.8	39.3
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	29	32.6	32.6	71.9
	DISAGREE	22	24.7	24.7	96.6
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

would take very little change in my personal circumstances to cause me to leave this Council

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	4	4.5	4.5	4.5
	AGREE	13	14.6	14.6	19.1
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	17	19.1	19.1	38.2
	DISAGREE	40	44.9	44.9	83.1
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	15	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Often I find it difficult to agree with this Council's policies on employee matters

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	2	2.2	2.2	2.2
	AGREE	11	12.4	12.4	14.6
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	32	36.0	36.0	50.6
	DISAGREE	39	43.8	43.8	94.4
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	5	5.6	5.6	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Deciding to work for this Council was definitely a mistake on my part

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	2	2.2	2.2	2.2
	AGREE	1	1.1	1.1	3.4
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	6	6.7	6.7	10.1
	DISAGREE	38	42.7	42.7	52.8
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	42	47.2	47.2	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work that I do

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	3	3.4	3.4	3.4
	AGREE	35	39.3	40.2	43.7
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	10	11.2	11.5	55.2
	DISAGREE	22	24.7	25.3	80.5
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	17	19.1	19.5	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

My manager is quite competent in doing his/her work

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	14	15.7	15.7	15.7
	AGREE	45	50.6	50.6	66.3
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	22	24.7	24.7	91.0
	DISAGREE	6	6.7	6.7	97.8
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	2	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

I like the people I work with

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	22	24.7	24.7	24.7
	AGREE	61	68.5	68.5	93.3
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	5	5.6	5.6	98.9
	DISAGREE	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

There is really too little chance for promotion in my job

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	7	7.9	8.0	8.0
	AGREE	37	41.6	42.0	50.0
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	20	22.5	22.7	72.7
	DISAGREE	21	23.6	23.9	96.6
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	AGREE	32	36.0	36.0	37.1
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	27	30.3	30.3	67.4
	DISAGREE	26	29.2	29.2	96.6
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Communication seems good within this Council

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	2	2.2	2.3	2.3
	AGREE	30	33.7	34.5	36.8
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	26	29.2	29.9	66.7
	DISAGREE	19	21.3	21.8	88.5
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	10	11.2	11.5	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	4	4.5	4.5	4.5
	AGREE	31	34.8	34.8	39.3
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	33	37.1	37.1	76.4
	DISAGREE	17	19.1	19.1	95.5
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

My manager is unfair to me

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	3	3.4	3.4	3.4
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	14	15.7	16.1	19.5
	DISAGREE	37	41.6	42.5	62.1
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	33	37.1	37.9	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

The goals of the Council are not fair to me

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	AGREE	5	5.6	5.7	5.7
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	17	19.1	19.3	25.0
	DISAGREE	60	67.4	68.2	93.2
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	6.7	6.8	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

find I have to work harder at my job because of the incompetence of the people I work with

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	3	3.4	3.4	3.4
	AGREE	20	22.5	22.5	25.8
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	21	23.6	23.6	49.4
	DISAGREE	37	41.6	41.6	91.0
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	8	9.0	9.0	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	5	5.6	5.6	5.6
	AGREE	20	22.5	22.5	28.1
	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	31	34.8	34.8	62.9
	DISAGREE	24	27.0	27.0	89.9
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	9	10.1	10.1	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Q. How would you describe your management style? Please provide four words.

How would you describe your management style? word1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fair	44	49.4	51.2	51.2
	Supportive	9	10.1	10.5	61.6
	Understanding	1	1.1	1.2	62.8
	Balanced	2	2.2	2.3	65.1
	Open	1	1.1	1.2	66.3
	Helpful	5	5.6	5.8	72.1
	Objective	1	1.1	1.2	73.3
	Firm	1	1.1	1.2	74.4
	Approachable	4	4.5	4.7	79.1
	Flexible	2	2.2	2.3	81.4
	Honest	2	2.2	2.3	83.7
	Professional	2	2.2	2.3	86.0
	Caring	2	2.2	2.3	88.4
	Thoughtful	1	1.1	1.2	89.5
	Emphatic	1	1.1	1.2	90.7
	Compassionate	1	1.1	1.2	91.9
	Sympathetic	2	2.2	2.3	94.2
	Clear	1	1.1	1.2	95.3
	Respectful	1	1.1	1.2	96.5
	Fast	1	1.1	1.2	97.7
	Encouraging	1	1.1	1.2	98.8
	Sensitive	1	1.1	1.2	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	999	3	3.4		
Total		89	100.0		

How would you describe your management style? word2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fair	17	19.1	19.8	19.8
	Supportive	6	6.7	7.0	26.7
	Empathetic	2	2.2	2.3	29.1
	Understanding	8	9.0	9.3	38.4
	Open	5	5.6	5.8	44.2
	Helpful	11	12.4	12.8	57.0
	Consistent	2	2.2	2.3	59.3
	Firm	4	4.5	4.7	64.0
	Approachable	4	4.5	4.7	68.6
	Flexible	1	1.1	1.2	69.8
	Honest	3	3.4	3.5	73.3
	Honest	2	2.2	2.3	75.6
	Focused	1	1.1	1.2	76.7
	Caring	2	2.2	2.3	79.1
	Assertive	1	1.1	1.2	80.2
	Compassionate	1	1.1	1.2	81.4
	Sympathetic	4	4.5	4.7	86.0
	Enquiring	1	1.1	1.2	87.2
	Alert	1	1.1	1.2	88.4
	Equitable	1	1.1	1.2	89.5
	Informative	1	1.1	1.2	90.7
	Unbiased	1	1.1	1.2	91.9
	On the ball	1	1.1	1.2	93.0
	Doer	1	1.1	1.2	94.2
	Encouraging	1	1.1	1.2	95.3
	Friendly	3	3.4	3.5	98.8
	Prompt	1	1.1	1.2	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	999	3	3.4		
Total		89	100.0		

How would you describe your management style? word3

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fair	11	12.4	13.6	13.6
	Supportive	7	7.9	8.6	22.2
	Understanding	6	6.7	7.4	29.6
	Open	1	1.1	1.2	30.9
	Helpful	8	9.0	9.9	40.7
	Objective	1	1.1	1.2	42.0
	Consistent	2	2.2	2.5	44.4
	Firm	8	9.0	9.9	54.3
	Approachable	3	3.4	3.7	58.0
	Flexible	3	3.4	3.7	61.7
	Honest	5	5.6	6.2	67.9
	Sincere	2	2.2	2.5	70.4
	Honest	3	3.4	3.7	74.1
	Positive	1	1.1	1.2	75.3
	Caring	1	1.1	1.2	76.5
	Good listener	2	2.2	2.5	79.0
	Thoughtful	1	1.1	1.2	80.2
	Emphatic	1	1.1	1.2	81.5
	Sympathetic	2	2.2	2.5	84.0
	Clear	2	2.2	2.5	86.4
	Reflective	1	1.1	1.2	87.7
	Proactive	2	2.2	2.5	90.1
	Astute	1	1.1	1.2	91.4
	Confidential	1	1.1	1.2	92.6
	Facilitative	1	1.1	1.2	93.8
	Friendly	2	2.2	2.5	96.3
	Realistic	1	1.1	1.2	97.5
	Practical	1	1.1	1.2	98.8
	Activist	1	1.1	1.2	100.0
	Total	81	91.0	100.0	
Missing	999	8	9.0		
Total		89	100.0		

How would you describe your management style? word4

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fair	3	3.4	4.2	4.2
	Supportive	9	10.1	12.5	16.7
	Empathetic	2	2.2	2.8	19.4
	Understanding	4	4.5	5.6	25.0
	Open	1	1.1	1.4	26.4
	Direct	1	1.1	1.4	27.8
	Helpful	10	11.2	13.9	41.7
	Consistent	3	3.4	4.2	45.8
	Thorough	1	1.1	1.4	47.2
	Firm	5	5.6	6.9	54.2
	Approachable	2	2.2	2.8	56.9
	Flexible	2	2.2	2.8	59.7
	Honest	1	1.1	1.4	61.1
	Honest	2	2.2	2.8	63.9
	Professional	2	2.2	2.8	66.7
	Caring	1	1.1	1.4	68.1
	Good listener	3	3.4	4.2	72.2
	Strict	6	6.7	8.3	80.6
	Emphatic	1	1.1	1.4	81.9
	Compassionate	1	1.1	1.4	83.3
	Sympathetic	1	1.1	1.4	84.7
	Clear	2	2.2	2.8	87.5
	Outcome driven	1	1.1	1.4	88.9
	Discreet	1	1.1	1.4	90.3
	Sensible	1	1.1	1.4	91.7
	Informative	1	1.1	1.4	93.1
	Enabling	1	1.1	1.4	94.4
	Encouraging	1	1.1	1.4	95.8
	Friendly	1	1.1	1.4	97.2
	Systematic	1	1.1	1.4	98.6
	Pragmatist	1	1.1	1.4	100.0
	Total	72	80.9	100.0	
Missing	999	17	19.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Thinking about your general management style, please indicate how often you think you engage in the following behaviours.

Making my attitudes clear to the group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	20	22.5	22.7	22.7
	OFTEN	56	62.9	63.6	86.4
	OCCASIONALLY	12	13.5	13.6	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Putting suggestions made by the group into operation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	10	11.2	11.4	11.4
	OFTEN	70	78.7	79.5	90.9
	OCCASIONALLY	8	9.0	9.1	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Finding time to listen to group members

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	47	52.8	52.8	52.8
	OFTEN	41	46.1	46.1	98.9
	OCCASIONALLY	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Criticising poor work

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	OFTEN	12	13.5	13.6	14.8
	OCCASIONALLY	55	61.8	62.5	77.3
	SELDOM	20	22.5	22.7	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Speaking in a manner not to be questioned

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	OFTEN	4	4.5	4.5	4.5
	OCCASIONALLY	31	34.8	34.8	39.3
	SELDOM	32	36.0	36.0	75.3
	NEVER	22	24.7	24.7	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Looking out for the personal welfare of individual group members

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	46	51.7	51.7	51.7
	OFTEN	39	43.8	43.8	95.5
	OCCASIONALLY	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Keeping the group well informed

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	50	56.2	56.8	56.8
	OFTEN	36	40.4	40.9	97.7
	OCCASIONALLY	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Treating group members as if they were my equals

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	49	55.1	56.3	56.3
	OFTEN	32	36.0	36.8	93.1
	OCCASIONALLY	4	4.5	4.6	97.7
	SELDOM	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Get what I ask for from my superiors

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	4	4.5	4.6	4.6
	OFTEN	44	49.4	50.6	55.2
	OCCASIONALLY	34	38.2	39.1	94.3
	SELDOM	5	5.6	5.7	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Ask that group members follow standard rules and regulations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	43	48.3	48.9	48.9
	OFTEN	35	39.3	39.8	88.6
	OCCASIONALLY	9	10.1	10.2	98.9
	SELDOM	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Making group members feel at ease when I am talking to them

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	61	68.5	69.3	69.3
	OFTEN	26	29.2	29.5	98.9
	OCCASIONALLY	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Letting group members know what is expected of them

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	47	52.8	53.4	53.4
	OFTEN	39	43.8	44.3	97.7
	OCCASIONALLY	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Maintaining definite standards of performance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ALWAYS	43	48.3	48.9	48.9
	OFTEN	43	48.3	48.9	97.7
	OCCASIONALLY	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Refusing to explain my actions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	OFTEN	2	2.2	2.3	2.3
	OCCASIONALLY	5	5.6	5.7	8.0
	SELDOM	28	31.5	31.8	39.8
	NEVER	53	59.6	60.2	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I feel confident in applying the absence policy when members of my team have been absent.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	37	41.6	42.0	42.0
	AGREE	37	41.6	42.0	84.1
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	5	5.6	5.7	89.8
	DISAGREE	6	6.7	6.8	96.6
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

I have a clear understanding of the Council's absence management policy

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	28	31.5	32.2	32.2
	AGREE	32	36.0	36.8	69.0
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	12	13.5	13.8	82.8
	DISAGREE	13	14.6	14.9	97.7
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

I am unsure as to what role HR play in the managing absence process

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	3	3.4	3.4	3.4
	AGREE	24	27.0	27.3	30.7
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	22	24.7	25.0	55.7
	DISAGREE	33	37.1	37.5	93.2
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	6.7	6.8	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

I am clear about which parts of absence management I am responsible for

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	37	41.6	42.0	42.0
	AGREE	48	53.9	54.5	96.6
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

I do not always know how to deal with absence cases

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	1	1.1	1.2	1.2
	AGREE	11	12.4	12.8	14.0
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	26	29.2	30.2	44.2
	DISAGREE	40	44.9	46.5	90.7
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	8	9.0	9.3	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	3	3.4		
Total		89	100.0		

I have all the support I need to be able to carry out my people management duties

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	9	10.1	10.2	10.2
	AGREE	36	40.4	40.9	51.1
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	15	16.9	17.0	68.2
	DISAGREE	21	23.6	23.9	92.0
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	7	7.9	8.0	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Absent employees are treated quite harshly by the Council's procedures

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	AGREE	13	14.6	14.8	15.9
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	19	21.3	21.6	37.5
	DISAGREE	36	40.4	40.9	78.4
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	19	21.3	21.6	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Senior managers have communicated the importance of managing absence to me

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	24	27.0	27.3	27.3
	AGREE	51	57.3	58.0	85.2
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	12	13.5	13.6	98.9
	DISAGREE	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Managing absence is an important part of my daily routine

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	27	30.3	30.7	30.7
	AGREE	45	50.6	51.1	81.8
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	12	13.5	13.6	95.5
	DISAGREE	3	3.4	3.4	98.9
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

All absences in my team are recorded on a daily basis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	23	25.8	26.1	26.1
	AGREE	38	42.7	43.2	69.3
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	14	15.7	15.9	85.2
	DISAGREE	11	12.4	12.5	97.7
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

I do not have enough time to be proactive in trying to reduce absence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	8	9.0	9.1	9.1
	AGREE	30	33.7	34.1	43.2
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	22	24.7	25.0	68.2
	DISAGREE	23	25.8	26.1	94.3
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	5	5.6	5.7	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Line managers are not the best people to be in charge of managing absence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	AGREE	11	12.4	12.5	13.6
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	18	20.2	20.5	34.1
	DISAGREE	40	44.9	45.5	79.5
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	18	20.2	20.5	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

I have enough time in my normal working day to manage absence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	7	7.9	8.0	8.0
	AGREE	33	37.1	37.5	45.5
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	18	20.2	20.5	65.9
	DISAGREE	24	27.0	27.3	93.2
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	6.7	6.8	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

My performance in managing absence is judged by my manager

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	19	21.3	21.6	21.6
	AGREE	30	33.7	34.1	55.7
	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	23	25.8	26.1	81.8
	DISAGREE	15	16.9	17.0	98.9
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Q. Please provide the following information on your personal characteristics

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	5	5.6	5.8	5.8
	MALE	18	20.2	20.9	26.7
	FEMALE	63	70.8	73.3	100.0
	Total	86	96.6	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	3	3.4		
Total		89	100.0		

Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-29	2	2.2	2.3	2.3
	30-39	11	12.4	12.6	14.9
	40-49	38	42.7	43.7	58.6
	50-59	34	38.2	39.1	97.7
	60 OR OVER	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	87	97.8	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	2	2.2		
Total		89	100.0		

Total length of service

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-3 YEARS	7	7.9	8.0	8.0
	4-6 YEARS	6	6.7	6.8	14.8
	7-9 YEARS	6	6.7	6.8	21.6
	10 YEARS OR MORE	65	73.0	73.9	95.5
	5	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	88	98.9	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	1	1.1		
Total		89	100.0		

Job grade

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	GRADE A-D	4	4.5	4.8	4.8
	SCALE 4-6	22	24.7	26.2	31.0
	SO1 TO PO3	8	9.0	9.5	40.5
	PO4-PO10	24	27.0	28.6	69.0
	OTHER	25	28.1	29.8	98.8
	6	1	1.1	1.2	100.0
	Total	84	94.4	100.0	
Missing	NO RESPONSE	5	5.6		
Total		89	100.0		

Appendix Seven - Responses to Question E1

Question E1: Please give four words that you think describes your management style when you are managing the absence of your staff. For example: fair, strict, helpful

Rank	Word	Frequency
1	Fair	65
2	Helpful	34
3	Supportive	31
4	Understanding	19
5	Firm	18
6	Honest	15
7	Approachable	13
8	Sympathetic	9
=9	Flexible	8
	Open	8
11	Consistent	7
=12	Caring	6
	Empathetic	6
	Strict	6
=15	Clear	4
	Friendly	4
	Professional	4
=18	Compassionate	3
	Encouraging	3
=20	Balanced	2
	Good listener	2
	Informative	2
	Objective	2
	Proactive	2
	Sincere	2
	Thoughtful	2
=27	Activist	1
	Alert	1
	Assertive	1
	Astute	1
	Confidential	1
	Direct	1
	Discreet	1
	Doer	1
	Enabling	1
	Enquiring	1
	Equitable	1
	Facilitative	1
	Fast	1
	Focused	1
	On the ball	1
	Outcome driven	1
	Positive	1
	Pragmatist	1
	Prompt	1
	Reflective	1
	Respectful	1
	Sensible	1
	Sensitive	1
	Systematic	1
	Unbiased	1

Appendix Eight - Cultural aspects that might influence sickness absence

Source: Reijenga (2006:101-103)

Shared values	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involvement of the employees with the organisation• The relationship between private and working life• Awareness of costs of sickness absence• Atmosphere on the workplace
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Management are involved with the wellbeing of the employees: the employees feel themselves involved with the management and with each other• Management provides good labour conditions• Middle management takes the lead and is in charge of HR issues
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The distance between employee and supervisor (including the span of control of managers)• Job differentiation within the organisation• Recent or expected reorganisations
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workload (physical, mental)• Occupational health interventions or other prevention policies• Outspoken policy on sickness absence or on return-to-work issues• Internal communication and transparency on sickness absence and return-to-work policies and interventions• People do as they are told: tasks within sickness absence policies are executed• Enough time, people, money and means for interventions to reduce sickness absence• The work is adjusted if needed
Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supervisors try to prevent sickness absence• Supervisors are willing to discuss the prevention of sickness absence: they give employees the opportunity to discuss health- or workload-related issues• Employees feel themselves 'valuable' and supported by the supervisor• Sick or disabled employees are respected and receive attention of the supervisor and the colleagues
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job satisfaction• Employability• Flexibility of the work• Orientation towards work• Composition of the personnel
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competences for leadership• Competence development for employees• Qualified HR staff• Qualified service providers working within the organisation for guidance in sickness absence and return to work

Appendix Nine - Recommendations from Ritchie et al. (2005) on desirable features of absence recording systems

- The graphical presentation of reports where possible (on organisational, departmental and individual levels)
- The potential for all staff to input information directly to the system (with suitable safeguards and procedures in place to ensure non-corruption of data)
- The identification of different illness and disability information (to trigger different interventions and actions as early as possible)
- The use of simple classifications
- The ability to put in different date ranges (using UK format)
- The ability to differentiate between self-certification, GP certification, long and short-term absences
- Providing information about actions that could be taken
- Providing information on good attendance
- The ability to use sickness absence data to work out cost issues (“getting the true cost of absence”)
- The ability to use sickness absence data to work out the % of hours worked or lost
- The ability to link to other absence/attendance information and pay systems;
- Allowing benchmarking of data against others
- The ability to be flexible to the needs of the organisation

Source: Ritchie et al. (2005:23)

Appendix Ten - Peer-reviewed work created and disseminated by the author on the subject of absence management

10.1	Article in People Management: Robson, F. (2006) 'How to manage absence effectively', <i>People Management</i> , 12(17), pp.44-45.
10.2	Article in People Management: Robson, F. (2007a) 'How to encourage an attendance culture', <i>People Management</i> , 13(11), pp.42-43.
10.3	Article in People Management: Robson, F. (2007b) 'Line managers are aware of their role in handling absence, but lack support', <i>People Management</i> , 13(17), pp.50.
10.4	Conference paper: Robson, F (2007c) ' <i>Absence in the Public Sector – Are Managers Managing?</i> ', <i>CIPD Professional Standards Conference</i> , Keele University, Keele, 26-27 June.
10.5	Conference paper: Robson, F. (2007d) ' <i>Managing absence in Local Government: Why do Social Services Departments report consistently higher levels of absence?</i> ' <i>British Academy of Management Annual Conference 2007</i> , University of Warwick, Warwick, 12-13 September.
10.6	Excerpts from toolkit: Robson, F. (2008a) <i>Absence management</i> . London: CIPD.
10.7	Conference paper: Robson, F., Mavin, S. and Robson, A. (2008) Putting together the absence management jigsaw: Are effective line managers the missing piece?, <i>British Academy of Management Annual Conference 2008</i> , University of Leeds, Harrogate, 10-11 September.

Appendix 10.1

People Management article: How to...manage absence effectively

Absenteeism is an issue that affects all organisations. The CIPD's 2006 Absence Management survey reveals that an average of eight days a year per employee are lost to absence, costing £598 per worker, while the CBI's report, Absence Minded: Absence and Labour Turnover 2006, puts the estimated cost of absence to UK employers at a staggering £13.2 billion a year.

Of course, these figures don't tell the whole story - there are plenty of other less tangible costs and implications. These include the additional workload inflicted on employees who have to cover for absent colleagues, recruiting and training replacements, and the inevitable drop in overall levels of work and customer service when headcount is reduced.

Academic and practitioner research in this area has tended to focus on identifying relationships between personal characteristics/organisational factors and employee absence, as well as looking at the impact of interventions such as return-to-work interviews. So far, results have been contradictory, with no really conclusive findings. But while we've yet to find a miracle cure, there are actions an organisation can take to manage absence more effectively.

1 PUT A POLICY IN PLACE

Research has consistently demonstrated that organisations with absence policies benefit from lower rates of absence. As a minimum, a policy should cover the following areas:

- procedures for reporting absence, including certification requirements;
- the arrangements for contractual sick pay and how this relates to statutory sick pay;
- the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved;
- the arrangements for return-to-work interviews;
- how long-term and short-term absence will be managed.

The policy must be accessible and communicated to all employees.

2 DEFINE THE ROLES

Ensure that everyone in the organisation is clear about who has responsibility for managing absence. Think about the following as a starting point:

- Who can accept phone calls?
- Who is responsible for recording the details of the absence?
- Who carries out return-to-work interviews?
- Who compiles and communicates the statistics?
- Who highlights potential problems?
- Who ensures that the policy is being adhered to?
- Who sets targets?

- Who provides training to line managers?

Be particularly clear about the relationship between the HR department and line managers, as research has revealed that any misunderstanding about the roles of these two key players can be a major problem.

3 RECOGNISE THE ROLE OF LINE MANAGERS

Line managers play an extremely important and often underrated role in managing absence. They can literally make or break the effectiveness of a policy. So it is important that they understand the policy and know how to put it into practice. This should be supported by regular and effective training in absence management and associated HR policies.

4 ACT CONSISTENTLY

It is important to act consistently and in line with your policy. This means that you should carry out return-to-work interviews with everyone, not only the odd person who is suspected of malingering.

Don't forget about the wealth of legislation associated with managing absence. You need, for example, to be careful about disciplining any employee covered by the Disability Discrimination Act if their absence was related to their disability. It is also essential that you have accurate and up-to-date information, and keep records of all conversations and meetings. This area should be emphasised in your managing absence training programme.

5 DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

In the CIPD's Absence Management survey, respondents said that 15 per cent of absence may be non-genuine. This means that 85 per cent -- i.e., most absence -- is deemed to be genuine. So the tone of return-to-work interviews should be supportive, not suspicious or hostile. Try to identify any steps the organisation can take to assist the employee.

And remember, achieving 100 per cent attendance is not necessarily desirable if this results in people being at work when they shouldn't be. They may end up spreading their condition to others or exacerbating the problem so that it leads to a longer period of absence.

6 RECORD ABSENCES ACCURATELY

Records should be updated on a daily basis. Absence problems are usually best tackled if they can be nipped in the bud -- it's hard to have a discussion with someone about a period of absence that occurred six months ago. This may also act as a deterrent to people taking unnecessary days off.

7 MAKE GOOD USE OF YOUR DATA

Don't merely calculate absence data and then file it in a drawer somewhere. It needs to be communicated to managers and acted upon. This must be done on a regular basis or the information will be useless. The following should be calculated as a minimum:

- the number of days and number of occasions of absence per employee;
- absence rates by department/team.

Effective IT systems should also be able to identify patterns, such as absences on the same day of the week, or before or after annual leave.

8 OBTAIN PROFESSIONAL ADVICE

Make use of occupational health expertise to support employees and get them back to work after periods of illness. This is becoming vitally important as the government increases the emphasis on rehabilitation of absent employees.

9 BE MORE PROACTIVE

Could you offer services such as health screening, healthy food initiatives in your canteens, or discounts to leisure facilities? This doesn't have to be a major and costly exercise, as simple things such as encouraging people not to use lifts or providing routes for lunchtime walks can also be effective.

Key points

- Obtain senior management commitment.
- Ensure that employees understand the impact of absence.
- Communicate the policy and act consistently.
- Make sure you have an accurate picture of absence -- don't rely on subjective opinions.
- Be supportive of absent employees.
- Be proactive about health issues.
- Train and support line managers.
- Monitor how absence is being managed.
- Make use of occupational health experts.
- Record absence accurately, on a regular basis,

By Fiona Robson

Fiona Robson is a graduate tutor at Newcastle Business School Northumbria University. She is currently conducting her doctoral research on the role of line managers in managing absence in the public sector.

<http://www.newcastlebusinessschool.co.uk/>

Appendix 10.2

People Management article: How to... develop an attendance culture

There's a strong reasoning behind focusing on absence reduction because of the high costs to organisations and their employees. But in addition to reducing absence, companies should look to develop a culture of attendance. This can be described as motivating staff to want to attend work wherever possible so that they are absent only when they are genuinely too ill to come to work.

For an attendance culture to become the norm, a proactive approach is needed. It's also necessary to consider the wide range of factors that may influence attendance levels. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, the following points will help to facilitate the process.

1. Identify problem areas

To design and implement an appropriate strategy, it is necessary to know what the main problems are. What is making your employees feel unhappy? What issues may have an impact either directly or indirectly on absence levels? This can be investigated through consultation with employees and by working in partnership with trade unions. If many different problems are identified, this may require prioritising skills to concentrate on areas that could be improved in both the short and longer term.

2. Look at the work environment

Could your office be suffering from "sick building syndrome"? If you are trying to encourage attendance, you need to make the workplace as welcoming as possible. At the most basic level, this includes identifying and removing any safety hazards. But it is also possible to introduce some proactive initiatives at a small cost, such as providing easily accessible, fresh drinking water, changing the layout of rooms or (at an extra cost) replacing ageing equipment.

3. Think about the wider issues

Many organisations have an absence-driven culture where there is a perception that non-genuine absence is accepted, or even legitimised. One reason may be the management styles used by the managers who deal with absence on a daily basis. For example, do managers prevent unnecessary absence or do they make unwell employees feel obliged to come in even when they are not fit for work? If this is the case, it is necessary to take action so that managers are handling absence in a supportive manner and following the organisational policies and procedures.

4. Communicate your policy

Employees are often not aware of the problems unnecessary absence can cause, not only to the organisation but also to their colleagues. Make sure employees understand that this is potentially a win-win situation and that they can benefit as much as the organisation. Part of this may mean breaking down barriers or stereotypes that have arisen under the existing culture. This could be achieved through the provision of a tailor-made training programme for both employees and line managers. This may include challenging inappropriate practices and selling the benefits of attendance to all parties. It is important for line managers to send out positive messages to staff on the subject to try to engage them in the process.

5. Reinforce your values

The importance of attendance should be reflected in HR policies to show the organisation's commitment to it. This means that promotion of your attendance culture should start at the recruitment stage and feature prominently in your induction programme. Policies should highlight the fact that attendance is a vital part of the organisation's performance capacity and its ability to meet targets. They also need to work alongside existing absence management policies as there may still be some non-genuine absence that needs to be managed.

6. Educate your employees

Staff often report illness as the cause of their absence when it's not the real cause. Sometimes it may be down to illness of dependents or a domestic emergency. In these instances many organisations have provisions in their absence policy for emergency family leave, so it's not necessary to report it incorrectly as absence caused by personal illness. Ensure the existing absence policy and associated documents are accessible to staff. This should also help you to collect more accurate data on absence.

7. Consider flexible working

Organisations are becoming more and more aware of the need to pay serious attention to work-life balance and its role in recruitment and retention. Consider whether it would be possible to offer flexible working patterns to new and existing staff. This doesn't just mean offering staff part-time hours – there are many other options, such as term-time working, flexi-time, annualised hours and homeworking. If employees are able to carry out their work in a way that supports their personal circumstances, they may be less likely to need extra time off.

8. Gain senior commitment

Research has demonstrated the importance of senior managers showing their commitment towards the implementation of new policies and initiatives. It is not sufficient merely to champion this at the start of the culture change: it should be part of a continuous process, with managers being seen to value and participate in the new culture. The importance of attendance could be reinforced by publishing targets as one of the official indicators of performance.

Key points

- Undertake an audit to discover existing practices that may be barriers to an attendance culture.
- Pay attention to wider HR issues, such as whether managers handle absence appropriately.
- Emphasise the importance of attendance and its impact on organisational performance.
- Consider flexible working practices and their benefits for both the organisation and staff.
- Embed the new culture in all HR policies and procedures.
- Visible support from and engagement with line managers is essential as they have direct contact with staff and send out most of the messages.
- Zero absence is neither possible nor desirable!

Appendix 10.3

People Management article: Line managers are aware of their role in handling absence, but lack support

Research on the role of line managers in managing absence in two local authorities found that most were willing to accept this responsibility but lacked the information to do so effectively, and sometimes felt unsupported by other functions -- including corporate HR.

The research was part of a wider project involving 10 local authorities investigating the causes of sickness absence in their adult services departments, owing to the high number of days lost. In many cases absence levels were more than double the national average of eight days per employee per year (CIPD Absence Management 2006 survey). Work in two authorities focused on the under-researched area of the role of line managers in managing absence. Some 120 managers were surveyed and focus groups were held to explore the results in more detail. Absence policies and procedures were also analysed alongside the organisations' absence data.

The survey results demonstrated that the majority of line managers had a clear understanding of their own role and how they needed to work alongside others. This was unexpected as a number of previous studies had concluded that line managers were not willing to accept this as part of their role and that ambiguities existed in their working relationship with HR.

More than 80 per cent of managers said they carried out return-to-work interviews, but actual participation rates were not monitored. Mixed results occurred when they were asked to rate the support they received from others. Immediate managers and directorate-based HR were rated highly, while senior managers and corporate HR received less positive scores. One weakness in both organisations was a lack of understanding of the extent of the problem. The majority of respondents believed absence levels in their department were the same as or lower than in other departments, the organisation as a whole or other councils. This was despite the fact that in one of the authorities the average absence level in adult services was double that of the organisation as a whole.

This suggests the message about the importance of monitoring absence has not been cascaded effectively throughout the organisation. A number of context-specific issues were raised that may account for some of the variance between the departmental and organisation-wide statistics. These included significant changes in job roles, the need for upskilling, increased legislation and accountabilities, and the increasingly complex needs of clients.

There was evidence of good practice in both organisations, such as the use of clear policies, return-to-work interviews and trigger points. Unfortunately, the high absence levels suggest that they need to investigate wider variables.

It appears essential for managers to be aware of absence levels and receive timely data alongside targets and benchmarking information. A more holistic approach should be taken whereby targets are clear, adherence to the policy is monitored and managers are accountable for their part in the process.

Further reading:

- Managing Sickness Absence in the Public Sector: a joint review by the Ministerial Task Force for Health, Safety and Productivity and the Cabinet Office, London: The Stationery Office, HSE, 2004.
- Current Thinking on Managing Attendance: A Short Guide for HR Professionals, National Audit Office, 2005. Available at » www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/04-05/040518_researchpaper.pdf

KEY POINTS

- Line managers accept managing absence is their responsibility and have a clear understanding of the role of others.
- Contextual factors should be acknowledged and supported where appropriate.
- Monitoring absence data on a timely basis is essential and should be supported through the use of targets and benchmarking.
- Training is essential but must meet the specific needs of line managers.

Appendix 10.4

CIPD Professional Standards paper

Absence in the public sector: Are managers managing?

This paper provides a strong rationale for the need for research in the area of the role of first line managers (FLMs) in managing absence, particularly in the public sector. This is achieved by presenting an overview of the existing literature, before introducing the empirical work that has been carried out for this study. There are three key concepts investigated in this paper; absence in the public sector, the role of FLMs in the absence management process and best practice in managing absence. The context for this research is presented alongside the research methods that have been utilised. This paper finishes by concluding the findings and provides recommendations which should be relevant to both practitioner and academic communities.

Introduction

Managing sickness absence is possibly one of the most topical issues for HR practitioners as it is an issue that affects all businesses regardless of sector, size or age. The wider cost of absence to the UK economy is widely reported as being in excess of £13.2 billion (CBI, 2006) which confirms that the topic is worthy of further investigation. The last published CIPD (2006) survey calculated the cost per employee per year as being £598 (£680 average in public sector) but this does not allow for the less tangible costs such as impact on colleagues and managers, time taken to recruit and train replacements, and potential reduction in quality and quantity of outputs which can all have an impact on organisations (McHugh, 2001).

Absence levels in the public sector are consistently higher than their private sector counterparts (CBI, 2006) though figures differ slightly between studies, depending on sample sizes. CIPD (2006) revealed the difference between sectors to be the equivalent of 1.9 days, though HSE (2005) have suggested that private sector organisations may be less rigorous in the recording of absence which may mean that the actual gap between them is less pronounced. To put this difference in absence levels into context, CBI (2006) estimate that if public sector absence levels could be reduced to the same level of their private sector counterparts, a saving of £1.1 billion per year could be achieved in addition to the less tangible costs. However, HSE (2005) have explored the perceived differences in more detail and suggest that some of the headline figures provided by organisations such as CBI are misleading. This is based on the premise that the absence figures should take into account the size of the organisation and the difference in demographic profiles. After performing these standardisations, HSE (2005) believe that public sector employees only take an average of 0.3 days more sick leave per year than their public sector counterparts which is significantly less than CBI (2006).

Wooden (1990) proposes four key reasons why absenteeism levels may be higher in the public sector. Firstly he argues that there is greater job security, and therefore repeated absences are considered unlikely to lead to dismissal. Secondly he suggests that the demands of the jobs are fundamentally different because there are less competitive pressures, and that this can lead to lower performance standards which may ultimately provide less pressure for employees to attend work. In addition, Wooden (1990) and Vandenheuvel (1994) believe that the more generous sick leave entitlements and the perception of widespread lower levels of job satisfaction may also have an impact. It is interesting to note that this is not a problem which is unique to the UK as very similar issues have been identified in Australia by organisations such as the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO).

Over the last decade there has been a wealth of Government-led research looking at absence and proposing interventions to try and minimise avoidable absence, with one of the key documents being the joint review by the Ministerial Task Force for Health, Safety and Productivity and the Cabinet Office (Cabinet Office, 2004). This strong

focus on absence is likely to be linked to the large numbers of targets and performance indicators which must be achieved. Targets include those set by Gershon (2004) to achieve over £20 billion of efficiencies and HSE's (2004) target of reducing absence levels by 30%. This is alongside the best value performance indicators (bvpi) that Local Authorities must report on, (Audit Commission, 2005) including their targets for future performance. To support these targets, a number of recommendations have been made in publications such as Cabinet Office (2004) and National Audit Office (2006).

The key recommendations that are consistently offered are:

- Requirement for accurate recording and monitoring of absence
- Visible senior management commitment
- Training for managers
- A comprehensive policy and procedures
- Consistency in applying policy and procedures

Research also shows that in addition to complying with the above recommendations, ultimately organisations require a holistic approach to managing absence (Cabinet Office, 2004). The concentration on this area of people management and the resources that have been allocated to it may have begun to make a positive impact as CBI (2006) reports a reduction in levels of absence since their previous survey (CBI, 2005). However, the methodologies employed in these surveys do not allow us to verify whether or not this was the only changing variable. Cabinet Office (2005) discusses the progress that has been made since the publication of their 2004 strategy for reducing absence. This report indicates that progress has begun which is demonstrated in reduced absence levels, but concedes that it is a long term strategy whereby some interventions will need to be embedded over a period of years before a consistent reduction becomes apparent.

The role of FLMs

Having established the extent of the absence problem, and highlighted that it is the public sector that are suffering the most, it is appropriate to consider the role that FLMs now play in delivering people management issues. In the last decade a significant number of HR responsibilities have been devolved to FLMs (Bond and Wise, 2003) and in earlier research, Brewster and Larsen (2000) identified several reasons why this trend was instigated including cost reduction and to place responsibility with the people involved most directly with the employees. Although these issues provide a fairly strong justification for this change, the disadvantages of not having expert HR professionals on hand must also be acknowledged. Many authors have confirmed the important role that FLMs now play in people management processes in organisations (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995) including the fact that their practices and behaviours can have a strong impact on their employees and their commitment to the organisation (Thornhill and Saunders, 1998). The role of FLMs can be very challenging due to the complexity and competing priorities which is described by Cunningham, James and Dibben (2004:273) as:

"The balancing of production or service requirements, on the one hand, and compliance with organizational prescriptions as to how staff should be managed, on the other"

This suggests that in an already complex job it is possible that the pressures associated with managing absence could be seen as role overload (Dibben, James and Cunningham 2001a).

Looking specifically at the role of FLMs within the public sector is a particularly pertinent issue as their evolving role has been the subject of much discussion and this may have an impact on both how they carry out their people management duties and their outputs. Arroba and Wedgwood-Oppenheim (1994) suggest that FLMs have traditionally been promoted as they were highly competent in their own jobs, not

because of their potential for managerial competence or expertise in HR areas. This may mean that they are not sufficiently skilled in carrying out the full range of people management duties or may lack sufficient confidence or knowledge. This is reinforced in work by IPD (1995) which established that FLMS are not always confident and comfortable in carrying out all of their required tasks. One of the conclusions of the highly acclaimed work of Purcell et al. (2003) which investigated the people and performance link confirms the importance of the role of FLMS and states that it is the way that they implement and enact policies which can make a difference. As well as highlighting the importance of the role that FLMS carry out, this also reinforces the need for adequate training and support to enable the FLMS to carry out their people management responsibilities correctly (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995).

In addition it is essential that FLMS receive support from both senior managers and HR in order to be able to carry out their tasks effectively. This must also be incorporated into the design of HR policies, particularly when it is the FLMS that are charged with carrying them out (Purcell et al. 2003), perhaps one way of achieving this would be to encourage the input of FLMS at the design stage. The literature on the changing role of FLMS is also clear that they need to have a full understanding of their role with no ambiguities and an acceptance of their responsibilities (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003). The devolvement of many roles of people management to FLMS has an effect on the position of HR as they need to perform a different role which may be more 'consultative' or 'supportive' than in the past when they were dealing directly with employees. This is certainly the case in absence management (NAO, 2005).

Best practice in the management of absence

A wealth of literature is available which discusses the best way to manage absence and it is clear that there is no one right answer. The use of return-to-work interviews is considered to be the most effective intervention by practitioners (CIPD, 2006) when part of a package of absence management interventions. Nonetheless, sickness absence policies probably hold the overall key to managing absence (Bennett, 2002) as the use of return-to-work interviews and many of the other interventions are only effective when conducted as part of a more holistic process.

All public sector organisations are required to have a policy though it is interesting to note that 82% of respondents from this sector in the CIPD (2006) survey stated that their policy had changed within the last two years. This may be following the increased emphasis placed on absence management at both a national and local level. Of course the presence of a policy alone is not sufficient, it must be comprehensive and detailed so that all stakeholders (including absent employees) are clear about their role and responsibilities. Procedures relating to the policy should also be included which detail the actions that need to be taken, when and by whom. It is also important that the policy should clearly emphasise the organisational culture of attendance rather than being seen as existing only to crack down on absence (Hayday, 2006). An effective policy also 'acknowledges the interdependence of individual and organisational health' (McHugh, 2002:735) to reinforce the importance of attendance to all stakeholders and the impact that high levels of absence can have.

Bevan (2003) believes that measuring and monitoring of absence is essential but fears that this does not happen in most organisations. This means that it is essential for all spells of absence to be recorded accurately and on a timely basis. If the organisation does not have detailed records they are unlikely to be able to pursue cases where malingering is suspected. Other interventions which can be utilised include; referrals to Occupational Health practitioners, use of disciplinary procedures and use of trigger points. Alternatively, a more proactive approach could include the provision of health checks, reduced gym subscriptions and wellbeing advice.

The role of FLMS in managing absence

Looking specifically at the role of FLMS in managing absence, many reports have emphasised the vital role that they have to play, though this is not often based on

empirical evidence and therefore does not explore in detail how or why they can have an impact. Edwards (1982:2) clearly values the role of FLMS and states:

"What managers actually do, as distinct from what they think, will influence the nature of [absence] behaviour".

This view was confirmed in the later work of Bevan (2003:22) who believes:

"The role of line managers is crucial to developing good practice in managing attendance since they have the closest contact with the individuals concerned".

Dibben et al's (2001a) public services research established that the role of line managers was key across the range of organisations that they investigated and this view was reinforced in the later work of McHugh (2002) who believes that a definite link exists between good management practices and employee well-being. Looking specifically at public sector based research, this perception of FLMS is supported in much of the Government commissioned research (Cabinet Office, 2004) and Whitaker (2001:422) also believes that 'management attitudes and behaviours' may influence an employee's decision about whether they should attend work or be absent. There is clearly a body of evidence agreeing that the role of FLMS is important, but there are also challenges associated with them having responsibility for managing absence. Some concerns remain about the extent to which FLMS accept this as part of their role (Hayday, 2006) whilst McHugh's (2001) research established that one of the key issues was the lack of consistency in the way that FLMS manage absence. This is an interesting dilemma as whilst following policies is important there are also some instances whereby FLMS may need to display discretion (Bevan and Hayday, 1998). IPD (1995) argues that FLMS need to be accountable for areas such as managing absence and this may remind them of the importance that should be attributed to this area. This could be achieved through formal links with the performance management system. Dibben et al. (2001b:59) state that one of the principal hindering factors in FLMS managing absence was:

"the failure of line managers to adequately prioritise absence management, or to comply with the arrangements regarding such matters as the recording of absences and the carrying out of return-to-work interviews".

Specific concerns on a practical level that have been raised include; failure to maintain the required contact with employees and supporting them on their return to work (Dibben et al. 2001a). The fact that FLMS do not always feel equipped to deal with the situations they face in managing absence cases may be attributable to a lack of confidence or knowledge or be due to feelings of embarrassment (Bevan, 2003). Hayday (2006) confirms the importance of FLMS having confidence in their ability to follow the policies and suggests that without this confidence they will be unable to perform all of their required duties. In the public sector, FLMS are often hesitant about contacting absent employees in case this could be interpreted as harassment, there is also a stigma attached to having to potentially defend actions within an employment tribunal. This may be one of the reasons that Dibben et al's (2001a) public sector research discovered a lack of willingness to actively manage sickness absence. The wider remit of their newly devolved roles and the large amount of pressures on FLMS also means that they normally prioritise the operational tasks of someone being off absent rather than working through the appropriate procedures (McHugh, 2001).

Training on absence management is essential for FLMS (Bevan, 2003; Cabinet Office, 2004 and Acas, 2006) though the evidence suggests that this is not taking place consistently across organisations. Research by ANAO (2003) found that only one fifth of the respondents indicated that they had received specific training on managing absence. This is a concern when the best practice literature consistently reinforces the importance of it. As managing absence is a complex task with many inter-related tasks this must be reflected in the format, content and duration of training programmes (ANAo, 2003). It is also essential that it is offered on a regular basis and is comprehensive. To date many training programmes focus principally on how to follow

policies and procedures and this is unlikely to be sufficient; FLMs must also receive training in some of the softer skills such as being able to communicate effectively to lead a return-to-work interview and how to have difficult conversations (ACAS, 2006). They also need to learn how to analyse and interpret the absence data and learn how to use this data when employees hit organisational trigger points. These are clearly a diverse range of hard and soft skills and this must be taken into account at the design stage. Johnson et al. (2003) state that organisations need to be aware of their own levels of absence statistics so that they can take appropriate actions and this also enables benchmarking across other departments and organisations. In order to do this, organisations must have an I.T system capable of collecting the relevant information and providing it in a useable format.

Following on from this, the data must actually be provided on a timely basis, used promptly and to support the work of the FLMs (ANAO, 2003). This should enable early identification of problems rather than leaving it too late, as described in some of the organisational examples in Dunn and Wilkinson (2002). All of the stakeholders need to have clarity in who is responsible for what and how they work together as part of the holistic approach (ANAO, 2003). This includes FLMs, middle managers, senior managers, HR and employees, it is particularly important that FLMs understand their position and how they should work alongside HR (Robson, 2006) failure to do this can cause tensions amongst different groups in the organisation and makes effective management of absence very difficult. NAO (2005) also believes that senior management support is crucial and that their commitment to this area will help to emphasise the focus on employee well-being alongside the development of an attendance culture. McHugh's (2001) work highlighted the fact that FLMs believed that ultimately it was HR that had responsibility for policy implementation and the necessary monitoring arrangements, which is clearly an outdated approach in many organisations. McHugh (2002) found that there was an inconsistency between managers of their understanding of the policies and whilst many managers believed that they did have a good understanding, few could demonstrate their awareness and correct interpretation. Inability to understand the policies could account for this or it may be down to more pragmatic issues such as accessibility or lack of time to consult them.

To date, a limited amount of research has been conducted into how the characteristics of FLMs may have an impact on employee well-being such as the work of Moore, Grunberg and Greenberg (2005) who looked at the role of gender and Kerr, Boyle and Heaton (2006) who investigated emotional intelligence.

There is also some emerging literature which has identified that there may be a correlation between the management styles of FLMs and the impact on the absence levels of their employees (Johnson et al., 2003). Research by van Dierendonck et al. (2002) is also interesting in that it looks at the LMX (leader member exchange) relationship between FLMs and their employees. This study established that the relationship between the quality of the exchange relationship did have an 'important influence' on the well-being of subordinates, so further work is expected in this area.

Context of research

This research was commissioned as part of a wider research project which is investigating sickness absence in Adult Services Departments in Local Authorities (formerly known as Adult Social Services Departments) as part of an innovative collaboration of ten Local Authorities and a Business School, funded by two of the Regional Centres for Excellence. This project is important to the Authorities as part of their commitment to meeting Gershon's (2004) requirement for gaining efficiencies and was established because all of the Authorities reported their highest level of absence to be within their Adult Services Departments, this is depicted for the two Organisations featured in this research in Table 1. This element of the project involved working with two Local Authorities (shown as Authority A and Authority B) to look specifically at the role of FLMs in managing absence.

Table 1

	2002-03		2003-04		2004-2005		2005-06	
	Average for Council	Average for Adult SS	Average for Council	Average for Adult SS	Average for Council	Average for Adult SS	Average for Council	Average for Adult SS
Authority A	10.73 days	15.03 days	12.9 days	18.63 days	12.56 days	20.80 days	11.87 days	15.62 days
Authority B	14.3 days	n/a	14.25 Days	n/a	13.06 days	20.25 days	14.29 days	24.78 days

Figures shown are the average number of days of absence per employee per year .

There is some existing work available which discusses why absence is a particular problem in this Department and this includes the work of Balloch et al. (1995) who confirms that this is a common and nationwide issue. Horder (1999) suggests that the typical demographic profile of their workforces means that they are more likely to have higher absence levels. This is reflected in the findings of LGAR (2005) which shows that the majority of employees (80.6%) in this sector are female and research has consistently shown that women are absent from work more than men (Barham and Begum, 2005). In addition the age profile of the employees is heavily skewed towards those aged 50 plus, which again is the group who have been shown to have the highest levels of 'limiting longstanding illness' which is associated with higher average levels of long term absence (Barham and Leonard 2002). The nature of the jobs in this Department may also be a contributing factor as employees are often required to carry out jobs which are particularly physically and/or mentally demanding.

This research aimed to explore how managers perceived absence, how they understood their responsibilities (and the roles of the other stakeholders); how they carry out their duties; ratings of the support they receive; and their experience of managing absence within their organisation, with a view to making recommendations for dissemination across the ten Councils. As part of a consultancy project the aim was to provide recommendations rather than constructing a theoretical model.

Methodology

The study was carried out in January – February 2007 and a multi-method approach was used which included the following:

- Surveys to FLMS
- Focus group discussions carried out with FLMS
- Analysis of organisational absence data
- Analysis of organisational policies and procedures.

It was envisaged that this approach would enable a fuller picture of absence in the organisations by providing quantitative data alongside more qualitative methods which provide rich contextual data. In line with the consulted literature on this subject, the areas shown in Figure 1 were investigated.

Figure 1

- Managers' perceptions of absence levels
- Acceptance of absence management as a responsibility for FLMS
- Understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders
- Understanding of absence policy and procedures
- Carrying out of absence procedures
- Support received by FLMS.
- Evaluation of absence management training

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifying future development needs
--

Self-completion surveys were sent to all FLMS in the Adult Services Departments of the two Local Authorities. The survey explored a number of factors related to how FLMS manage absence, and looked at their understanding and knowledge of absence management. There was also a strong focus on their understanding of which stakeholders are responsible for different areas of the absence policy and to see if they accepted the importance of their own role. This was triangulated by comparing their interpretations of who was responsible for the various aspects with the organisations' policy and procedures.

The survey was distributed to over 200 managers and a response rate of over 60% was achieved which was a positive result in comparison to the average response rate for surveys of 55.6% identified in the work of (Baruch, 1999). Particularly when much UK based public sector research achieves a response rate of approx 30%. This good rate of return may be indicative of the fact that absence management is perceived as being an important issue. Following analysis of the survey results, focus groups were carried out to discuss some of the key results in more detail and to add some valuable context to the survey results. The policies of both organisations were analysed and their content was found to broadly similar and in line with best practice guidance (CIPD, 2006b and Acas, 2006). However the content did reinforce the point of Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) in suggesting that they had not been written in a user-friendly way to facilitate FLMS.

Due to the sensitive nature of the subject under investigation all participants were assured of anonymity in the research report and associated dissemination. In addition to the usual ethical considerations, the setting for this project meant that it was also covered by the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (DH, 2005). This led to some restrictions on the areas that could be covered by the research and prevented the use of some potentially useful variables.

Results

The FLMS were asked to self-report their own absence history for the last year as research has indicated that managers have lower levels than employees (Barham and Begum, 2005), this hypotheses was confirmed in the present study where the mean number of days lost per manager is in the '1-3' days band in both organisations. This is considerably less than the Departmental average of 15.62 days in Organisation A and 24.78 days in Organisation B. It is also worthy of note to highlight that almost half of all respondents reported that they had zero absence during the one year time period under investigation.

Understanding of the organisation's absence management policies was rated highly within both the focus groups and the survey results, where 85% of respondents rated their knowledge as good or excellent. Their knowledge of the policy was tested further by providing a list of tasks that need to be completed in relation to managing absence (as prescribed in the absence management policies of both organisations) and asking the participants to indicate who they understand to be responsible for carrying them out. An indication of the broad range of tasks is demonstrated in the examples given in Figure 2.

Figure 2

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensuring that the Disability Discrimination Act is adhered to• Ensuring that the absence policy is followed consistently• Developing strategies for the Council to minimise absence• Making sure that all employee's are aware of the Council's policy• Monitoring and analysing divisional absence records• Identifying when a trigger point has been reached• Carrying out return-to-work interviews |
|--|

- Identifying and managing short term absences
- Recognising and encouraging good attendance
- Ensuring that employees are aware of the impact of absence upon the Council

In addition to demonstrating their knowledge of the organisation's absence policies, they also expressed confidence in applying the policies and 85.4% also reported that they had a good or excellent understanding of their personal role in the associated procedures. Another interesting outcome was that over 86% of respondents believed that they had the most important role in the whole process. This suggests that FLMs do accept their role and understand how they have to work in partnership with the other stakeholders. It was also interesting that they did not suggest that HR were the key stakeholders as this would have been consistent with the existing literature (IPD, 1995).

The vast majority of respondents in both groups stated that they had attended some form of training on absence management, though some stated that it was discussed within a general management training event. However, of the 87% that had attended training, over 40% said that they had taken part over three years ago, which is clearly not in line with good practice which suggests that training should take place on a regular basis (Cabinet Office, 2004). However, over two thirds of those that had attended the training rated it as good or excellent which is positive news for the organisations. Despite the fact that the existing training had received positive reports, it is interesting to note that when the FLMs were asked if their knowledge on absence management was up to date the majority (68%) stated that it wasn't. Organisation B fared slightly better than Organisation A as only 43.8% said that they were not up to date in comparison to 64.5% of respondents from Organisation A. The confidence that FLMs have in HR is shown in the fact that they felt that the HR staff were the best people to deliver all of the training except for the issue of 'time to discuss specific cases with HR and senior management' which they think should be delivered by their own manager. This was consistent across both organisations.

In order to be able to provide specific recommendations to the organisations, the participants were asked to choose from a list of areas that they felt they needed training on, the most frequently shown ones are portrayed in rank order in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Organisation A	Organisation B
1. How to use the disciplinary policy when appropriate in absence cases.	1. How to use the disciplinary policy when appropriate in absence cases.
2. How to deal with sensitive situations and groups.	2. How to deal with sensitive situations and groups.
3. How to get the most support from Occupational Health.	3. Time to discuss specific cases with HR and senior management.
4. Support on completing the relevant forms and letters.	4. All areas of absence management
5. All areas of absence management	5. Support on completing the relevant forms and letters.
6. Advice on supporting employees when they return to work after an absence.	6. Advice on supporting employees when they return to work after an absence.
7. Understanding of their personal role in managing absence.	7. How to get the most support from Occupational Health.
8. Time to discuss specific cases with HR and senior management.	8. Understanding of their personal role in managing absence.
9. How to carry out return-to-work interviews.	9. How to carry out return-to-work interviews.

Analysis of the training requirements of the FLMs shows that there is little variance between the two organisations. It is interesting that one of the most practical issues was considered the least necessary – how to carry out the return-to-work interviews as it would have been reasonable to assume that this would be the first priority. The top five requirements are an interesting blend of hard and soft skills and cover a range of elements of the absence policy. This suggests that the existing training programme that placed an emphasis on how to do interviews was not necessarily meeting the needs of the FLMs.

Supporting FLMs is clearly an important issue and this was investigated within this study by asking the FLMs to assess the levels of support received from different stakeholders. Overall, the support from HR was rated positively, but when divided into 'Corporate' and 'Directorate based' HR, a different picture emerges where Directorate HR is related much more highly as 49.6% rather their service as good or excellent, in comparison to only 35% of respondents rating Corporate HR in these categories. This may be because Corporate HR will usually be in the position to make the final decision; of which FLMs may not always be in agreement. They were also asked to rate the support received from their managers (see Figure 4) in the managing absence process.

Figure 4

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Organisation A	42%	44%	12%	3%	15%	52%	27%	6%
Organisation B	14%	39%	33%	14%	2%	38%	43%	17%

Figure 4 suggests that generally FLMs are content with the support that they receive from their immediate managers and less so about their senior managers. This may be indicative of the fact that a closer relationship is likely to exist with immediate managers and there is generally a more straightforward communication chain in comparison with senior managers. One of the key findings was that the perception of FLMs regarding the levels of absence in the organisation was poor. Firstly, there was a large amount of missing responses which equated to 21.4% this was very high compared to the average number of missing responses for all of the other questions. This may be because managers were not aware of their own absence levels and/or those of the other comparator groups, despite this information being publicly available. Secondly, out of the given responses (shown in Figure 5) there appears to be a significant issue in that FLMs are underestimating their own levels of absence. Across both organisations the 'real' absence figures show that Adult Services has much higher absence levels than those of the Department, Function and across the whole Council, with the biggest variance being the Council-wide figures.

Figure 5

	Within your Department			Within your function			Across the Council		
	Higher	Lower	Same	Higher	Lower	Same	Higher	Lower	Same
Organisation A	17.4%	43.5%	39.1%	13.3%	53.3%	33.3%	31%	46%	23%
Organisation B	13%	51.3%	35.9%	8.1%	54.1%	37.8%	10.3%	51.3%	38.4%

This suggests that FLMs do not have a good understanding of their current performance in terms of levels of absence. This is concerning when it has been identified widely within the organisations as a strategic priority. Communication may play a role in this if the figures are simply not made available at FLM level. It may also indicate that absence levels and targets are not discussed within the current performance management systems. The literature that has been examined is clear about the importance of return-to-work interviews, so the fact that 83% of FLMs indicated that they do carry them out after every episode of absence is positive. As the majority of FLMs are carrying out the interviews this should in theory lead to a reduction in absences (and particularly non-genuine ones) but this is clearly not the case in either organisation. This may suggest that carrying out the interviews alone is not enough and perhaps there should be a focus on the quality of them by gaining feedback from both parties. Participants who indicated that they did not do this were asked to provide their reasons, two key ones emerged; lack of time to be able to carry them out; and the feeling that it was not necessary after short absences that were considered to be genuine.

Although only a small amount of FLMs state that they do not always lead an interview this can still have negative consequences on the organisation as it raises the issue of consistency amongst FLMs. The focus groups provided some rich qualitative information about why FLMs believe that their staff have higher than average levels of absence. Most of the reasons expressed were directly related to the context and nature of the job that they carry out; the key explanations offered are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The changing nature of jobs in Social Services including the administrative burden and plethora of performance targets. • Issues in the 'up-skilling' of some subordinates. • The environment in which the staff work makes them more susceptible to illness. • The physical nature of the job and the increasing complexity of the needs of their clients. • Generosity of the Council's sick pay scheme, with some employees knowing how to 'play the system'. |
|--|

One of the participants was anxious to point out that she believed that most of the sickness absence in her team was genuine, with a significant amount being specifically related to the job being carried out as it required a lot of physical strength which ultimately led to people requiring time off for musculo-skeletal problems. Many of the participants also commented on the trend of having to deal with more clients who are obese which is again putting a physical pressure on their employees. In addition it was suggested some teams now have to deal with a lot more complex mental health issues which are quite mentally difficult for employees to deal with and that this had led to an increase in stress-related absence. The final issue that arose surrounding the legitimacy of absences was raised by a manager in charge of residential accommodation and she discussed the fact that sometimes employees could not report for duty in case they passed on infections to their residents, which could have potentially fatal consequences.

The focus groups also reiterated the fact that FLMs appreciate that they have a large role to play in the management of absence, however they did not feel that they always received adequate support from others.

"Managers underestimate how complicated it is to manage absence, I have to find more staff, give them instructions, and supervise them – that is if I can find someone to do an extra shift"

They also emphasised the impact that staff absence can have on clients of the service, particularly on the more vulnerable ones who find it difficult to establish relationships with people. The majority of people revealed that they were aware of occasions where

'emotional blackmail' had been used as the only way of getting staff to agree to work extra hours, and all of the participants accepted that absence put a strain on the colleagues of the absent employees as well as themselves as FLMs. One respondent revealed that she regularly had to cover the work of absent employees herself and was regularly on 'toilet cleaning duties' at the expense of carrying out her normal management role.

The FLMs believed that their role in the process (and the time it takes) is underestimated and this is often not taken into account by their own managers, particularly into the amount of related administration that has to be completed. This was demonstrated by one member who commented:

"Every time I have a conversation with someone about absence I make a note of it, if I phone them I keep a record and then when I meet them I have to record it and may have to take actions... If I don't do this, HR might not support my case, or I might get accused of harassment"

The participants did appear to appreciate the importance of trying to reduce absence but this was because of the practical implications rather than a directive from senior managers and HR.

Conclusions

Some elements of this research agree with the findings of Cabinet Office (2004:3) in that public sector organisations do comply with many best practice interventions such as having a comprehensive policy, carrying out return-to-work interviews and provision of training to FLMs. However as with the UK-wide research, improvements still need to be made so that organisations are pursuing a joined up approach. This could include the provision of proactive approaches to encouraging attendance. Some of the headline results of this research may be perceived as quite positive for the two organisations, however this also presents a problem for the organisation as the reasons behind the higher than average absences remain to some extent unknown. It is therefore difficult to implement 'total' solutions to try and reduce absence levels. This also offers an interesting finding for absence researchers in that there is definitely no 'miracle cure' for absence and even using a range of the best practice interventions does not guarantee success.

Awareness of the importance of absence is crucial and this means that senior managers have to ensure that this is communicated throughout the organisation and particularly to FLMs. This needs to be reinforced by making sure that FLMs are aware not only of absence targets but the impact that absence has on the organisation. They should also be able to see how they compare with others across the organisation and then for the organisation as a whole. This current gap in practice is not exclusively public sector based as CIPD (2006) reported that only 37% of respondents benchmark against other companies, whilst 40% declared that they had official targets. Simply having access to information is not sufficient to emphasise the importance of this area, managing absence should be referred to explicitly within job descriptions and should also feature as a standing performance management feature.

This research provides a consistent picture that FLMs accept their role and understand how this interacts with others; organisations should ensure that this partnership approach continues, particularly if changes are implemented. Reflecting on some of the points that were raised in the focus groups suggests that there are many issues that are context driven due to the nature of work in Adult Social Services. This may account for some of the reasons behind the fact that whilst absence is managed in the same way across the directorates in both organisations, that this department consistently has the highest levels of sickness absence. Wider HR issues need to be considered because of this to address some of the environmental and organisational factors that were raised by the focus group participants.

It was interesting that the survey results reported that in the majority of cases that managers did conduct a return-to-work interview after every absence episode, though it was perceived by the HR professionals that this may not always be the case. At present neither organisation monitors the carrying out of return-to-work interviews so this may be something that could be introduced as well as when the other tasks are being completed i.e. ensuring that managers are monitoring absence levels and trigger points. This would also enable them to achieve consistency in the performance between FLMs and provide data for use in performance reviews.

All research has limitations and this paper is no exception, one of the principal issues in this type of paper revolves around the fact that the research was client-led which meant that the survey could not reach the depth that may be otherwise used by the researcher. For example; if the participants had been asked to provide details of which specific team they managed in, this could have been correlated with the absence levels at an individual team level. This study is part of a wider research agenda, with the author's ongoing PhD being at the core. This Doctoral research investigates whether the personal and working characteristics of FLMs have a relationship with the absence levels of the employees that they manage. To conclude, yes, managers do appear to be managing absence though whilst there is definite evidence of good practice, there are clearly areas that could be improved upon.

Recommendations for practice

- Within this case study, the context of the department must be taken into account; this could take the form of a review of the working environment in the first instance.
- Liaising with Occupational Health professionals may identify positive attendance interventions.
- FLMs should be involved in any future revisions to the absence management policy and accompanying procedures.
- Organisations should consider implementing a mandatory training programme for all FLMs which should be regularly repeated. The content of the training should be continuously updated.
- To reflect the vital role that FLMs play, this must be acknowledged by senior managers and should be incorporated into management objectives and the formal performance management process.
- HR must provide FLMs with accurate absence data alongside comparative data and targets,
- Senior managers and HR should engage with FLMs to discuss any issues that have arisen as some of the issues raised in the focus groups for this research proved to be very insightful.

Appendix 10.5

BAM Developmental paper submission in the Public Management and Governance track.

Managing absence in Local Government: Why do Social Services Departments report consistently higher levels of absence?

Introduction

This paper examines absence management in the context of the public sector and looks specifically at the problems encountered in Social Services Departments (SSDs) as this department consistently has the highest levels of absence within Local Authorities (Employers Organisation, 2005a). This paper comes from the HR perspective and focuses on the needs of the organisation and managers in their attempts to try and reduce 'avoidable' absence.

This study analyses the results of an innovative research collaboration between ten Local Authorities and a Business School. This Absence Consortium was formed because all of the Local Authority members were concerned about the high levels of sickness absence within their SSDs. The aims of this externally funded project is to understand the root causes of sickness absence so that appropriate measures and interventions can be implemented. From the Local Authority perspective one of the principal aims is that this project will contribute to Gershon efficiency savings as well as contributing directly to the corporate aims and objectives of all of the members. It is also anticipated that this work will make an interesting contribution to the knowledge base in the area of managing sickness absence in the public sector and will provide some valuable recommendations for policy makers, practitioners and academics.

Literature Review

The estimated cost of sickness absence has been widely reported following the publication of CBI's (2006) report which calculates it as being £13.2 billion to the UK economy per year. Public sector absence has consistently been reported as being higher than in the private sector (CBI, 2006; CIPD, 2006; HSE, 2004) though exact figures vary between studies. In addition to the estimated direct costs it is important to recognise the indirect costs of absence. For example; the impact on the colleagues of the absent employee may need to take on additional work which may make their job more stressful (McHugh, 2001), managers need to make arrangements for work to be covered which may include additional supervision and training (Bevan, 2003). The organisation may also suffer from lower productivity, a reduction in levels of customer service and loss of reputation (Ho, 1997).

There are many pressures on Local Authorities to reduce their levels of absence significantly. Gershon's (2004) report tasks Local Authorities to achieve over £20 billion of efficiencies in public spending by 2007-2008. Reducing levels of absence would clearly be one way on which considerable savings could be made. In addition, 'proportion of working days/shifts lost to sickness absence' is one of the 'best value performance indicators' that must be published within Local Authority corporate strategies. There is pressure on Local Authorities to continuously seek to improve their performance indicators, which has been increased further by the provision of the package of 'freedom and flexibilities' that was introduced in 2002 (DCLG, 2006). The external and internal pressures that are placed on the organisations and their managers have led to criticisms that some public sector organisations are too focused on simply reducing their statistics rather than looking to solve the problems (Horder, 1999). This suggests that holistic and supportive approaches are not the priority.

Wooden (1990) proposes four key reasons why absenteeism levels may be higher in the public sector. Firstly he argues that there is greater job security, and therefore repeated absences are considered unlikely to lead to dismissal. Secondly he suggests

that the demands of the job are fundamentally different because there are less competitive pressures, and that this can lead to lower performance standards which may ultimately provide less pressure for employees to attend work. In addition, Wooden believes that the more generous sick leave entitlements and the perception of widespread lower levels of job satisfaction may also have an impact.

As this research is based within SSDs, it is relevant to provide some contextual information. Balloch et al. (1995) found that SSDs have consistently higher levels of absence than other Departments and described absenteeism as being a major problem. SSDs throughout the UK are consistently reporting problems with recruitment and retention (Employers Organisation, 2005b). This has led to the sector being identified as having the largest skills shortage within the public sector (Employers Organisation, 2005b) due to the high levels of labour turnover; reported recruitment difficulties and number of vacant posts. The widespread changes in the organisation and management of Social Services Departments in the last few years have been subject to a lot of commentary. Balloch et al's (1998) research discovered that many of the new changes could be linked with HR practices and it is therefore suggested that ultimately their dissatisfaction may have resulted in higher levels of absence.

When looking from the objective of trying to reduce absence, there are three key areas which will be investigated within this review of the literature. Firstly the research investigates relationships between the personal characteristics of employees and their absence records, followed by exploring the links between the 'working characteristics' of the employees and absence. Finally the role of absence management interventions is discussed.

Within absence research the most popular themes for research have involved profiling absent employees to see if employees with certain characteristics are more likely to be absent than others (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998). The most popular variables are gender (Dow Scott, 1990; Vandenheuvel and Wooden, 1995), age (Martocchio, 1989; Hackett, 1990), ethnic origin (Price, 1995) and levels of education (Garrison and Muchinsky, 1977). Unfortunately, despite the amount of research that has been published, there are still many contradictory findings. Horder (1999) suggests that the typical demographic profile of SSDs workforces means that they are more likely to have higher absence levels. This is reflected in the findings of LGAR (2005) which shows that the majority of employees (80.6%) in this sector are female and research has consistently shown that women are absent from work more than men (Barham and Leonard, 2002). There are other demographic characteristics that are consistent with this pattern. For example; LGAR (2005) states that the average age for employees working in Social Care is higher than in other public sector departments and previous research (Bevan, 2003) has indicated that this age range is shown to have the highest levels of absence. This study explores some additional characteristics such as length of service and career history and job grade to see if there are correlations with between these factors and absence. This study also makes an exciting contribution by investigating the concept of 'regional health' and whether this may have an impact on absence levels. This is particularly important for the Authorities where over 90% of their workers live within the boroughs which score highly on the index of deprivation.

In terms of working characteristics, there is a large amount of existing research in areas such as job satisfaction (Brooke and Price, 1989; Goldberg and Waldman, 2000), organisational commitment (Blau and Boal, 1987; Hackett, 1989; Zaccaro et al., 1993; Bennett, 2002) and job involvement (Brooke, 1986), where the data has been analysed to establish whether relationships exist with levels and frequency of absences. There is a separate field of research looking at the general performance of employees in Social Services which has suggested that issues such as those above are prevalent, it is therefore appropriate to investigate these issues looking specifically if they may lead to absence. For example; Allen et al. (1990) suggests that role ambiguity is an important issue for employees in this sector and this has led to feelings of dissatisfaction. This is interesting as there is also absence based research which

suggests that role ambiguity can lead to absence as a consequence of this dissatisfaction.

Another variable surrounds the nature of the potentially dangerous work environment of Social Care employees. Balloch et al's (1995) research showed that over 33.3% of their respondents had been attacked whilst carrying out their duties. Horder's (1999) research indicated that if work-related injuries or illnesses were excluded from the headline statistics the average amount of absence would be reduced significantly.

More recently the conclusions from a number of reports have reinforced the important role that line managers play in the process (IPD, 2005; Whitaker, 2001; HSE, 2004) though there is no empirical evidence which has looked specifically at this issue. This study will therefore develop a new strand of research by looking at managers roles in more detail by capturing both their personal and working characteristics.

Perhaps the most frequently researched working characteristic is that of job satisfaction, though it remains unclear whether relationships do exist with absence. Job satisfaction appears to be a controversial subject within Social Services Departments with Balloch et al's (1998) research suggesting that there were a number of different aspects of their job that employees were dissatisfied with. This suggests that the link between job satisfaction and absence is worthy of investigation within this study.

Absence interventions covers practices or processes which are used by the organisation to reduce avoidable absences whilst also supporting genuinely sick employees. CIPD (2006) established that the most frequently used absence interventions are; use of return to work interviews and disciplinary procedures. This research builds upon this work by investigating other methods such as Occupational Health services and use of work-life balance policies and procedures.

Research Methods

The size and nature of this project means that there a number of research methods were required to explore each topic in the most appropriate way. In addition to the analysis of organisational absence data and policies, this paper concentrates on the methods used to explore the links between absence and the following areas: work-life balance; employee satisfaction and the role of managers.

The streams which investigated links between absence, work-life balance and the role of managers used a series of focus groups to identify the key issues. HR Practitioners, managers and a range of employees all participated and provided some valuable and unique insights. The second stage of the research into work-life balance involved qualitative policy analysis and exploration of before and after absence data. The key research method when investigating the role of managers was a self-completion questionnaire which was distributed to all managers within two of the Authorities. This was a comprehensive questionnaire which included areas draw from a wide range of associated literature.

Quantitative data analysis was carried out on the overall organisational absence data and then comparisons were made with the data from SSDs. The data was then explored in more detail to identify trends, generate a series of profiles and to benchmark against existing research. This data was used to triangulate some of the responses to the focus groups and questionnaires.

Preliminary overview of results

As this is such a wide-reaching project with a number of different work streams, the actual results are not all available at present. To date the following results are offered:

- The absence profiles of staff within the SSDs are consistently different from the overall organisational profile.

- Line managers have an important role to play in managing absence and their personal and working characteristics show some correlations with the absence behaviours of their employees.
- Although there is insufficient quantitative data to establish a link between work-life balance policies and absence, anecdotal evidence suggests that a link exists.
- There is evidence to suggest that within this context there are links between employee satisfaction and absence.
- Regional health differences appear to correlate with absence levels.

Despite the fact that these Local Authorities comply with the majority of best practice guidance on the subject of absence management this research has shown that this is not enough. The nature of absence management is that there is no miracle cure to managing and reducing it (Robson, 2006) and the continuous nature of it means that organisations cannot afford to become complacent. This research has the potential to make a practical difference within the Authorities with a view to improving their performance and meeting associated targets, in addition to the contribution to knowledge in the academic research field.

Appendix 10.6

Excerpts from absence management mini toolkit

- **Contents**

- About the author
- Introduction
- Why we need this toolkit
- Making the case for effective absence management training
- Overview of skills and activities
- How to get the most out of the activities
- Organising your training session(s)
- Further resources
- Practical tools:

Section 2: Why is managing absence important?

- 2.1 Understanding the importance of managing absence
- 2.2 Looking at the impact of absence on others
- 2.3 The benefits of attendance and how to encourage it
- 2.4 The role of line managers
- 2.5 An overview of the legal framework

Section 3: Understanding and getting to grips with absence: Do you have a problem?

- 3.1 Why are people absent?
- 3.2 How can you measure absence?
- 3.3 Obtaining and understanding absence data
- 3.4 Clarifying roles in the absence management process

Section 4: Managing short term absences

- 4.1 Overview of methods of managing short term absences
- 4.2 Effective return-to-work interviews
- 4.3 Being proactive in managing absence
- 4.4 Embedding absence in your HR policies and procedures

Section 5: Managing long term absences

- 5.1 Understanding the issues in managing long term absences
- 5.2 Approaches to minimising long term absences
- 5.3 Dealing with long term absences
- 5.4 Supporting employees on their return to the workplace

Section 6: Practical skills for managers

- 6.1 Introduction to practical skills
- 6.2 Having difficult conversations
- 6.3 Using your listening skills
- 6.4 Communicating with your employees about absence

Section 7: Dealing with common problems

- 7.1 Common problems – short term absences
- 7.2 Common problems – long term absences

About the author

Fiona Robson is a Chartered Member of the CIPD and lectures at Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University. Fiona has led and been engaged in a number of organisational research and consultancy projects on absence management and has presented her work at a number of national and international conferences. Fiona is a regular contributor to CIPD's People Management magazine, including 'How to manage absence effectively' and 'How to develop an attendance culture', and has also had her work featured in Pay Magazine and Employee Engagement Today.

Prior to her academic career, Fiona worked for a number of years as a HR Manager for a public sector organisation which is where she first developed her interest in absence management. During this time Fiona gained a BA (Hons) Human Resource Management from Northumbria University, followed by a MA Human Resource Management from De Montfort University. Fiona's research interests include absenteeism, public sector management, the role of first line managers and leadership.

Introduction

Why we need this toolkit

Absence management is a key priority for most organisations due to the costs involved and the impact it can have. It is estimated that absence currently costs over £600 per employee per year in direct costs.

For a small business with 30 employees this means an average cost of more than £18,000 per year which is a significant outgoing. A larger organisation with more than 1,000 employees could therefore be looking at a cost of more than £600,000 per year. However, these calculations do not include less tangible costs which can be just as significant such as:

- Increased workload for colleagues
- Lower levels of customer service
- Increased workload of managers who have to reorganise work (or cover it themselves)
- Time and resources taken to recruit and train new staff
- Lower productivity
- Potential reduction in quality of products / services

Most organisations regardless of sector or size will have targets to reduce their levels of absence; the 2007 CIPD Absence survey confirms that increasing numbers of organisations are attempting to benchmark their performance in this area. Training in this area is therefore very important for organisations as part of their strategy to reduce their absence levels.

The vital role of line managers and HR practitioners is a common theme throughout all of the best practice guidance on managing absence, however to date there are few resources designed specifically to support them in order for them to be able to carry out their roles effectively. This toolkit aims to bridge that gap.

Unfortunately there is no miracle cure or no 'one size fits all' solution to the managing absence problem; however this toolkit aims to reduce absence by cutting out non-genuine spells of absence. This is achieved by developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of the learners so that they are well equipped to deal with the situations that find themselves in when managing absence.

Making the case for effective absence management training

If your organisation already has a target for reducing levels of absence, the case for providing training on absence management can be made fairly easily. If you need to persuade some of the key stakeholders that they should invest time in resources and training, here are some suggestions on how to make the business case:

1. **Highlight some of the key findings from the CIPD absence surveys.** Looking at the direct and indirect costs provides a very strong financial argument for trying to reduce levels of absence. The activities contained within this toolkit will equip managers and HR practitioners to be able to carry out best practice interventions at little additional expense. In many cases this will focus on enhancing existing skills so that they can deal with some of the more difficult situations. You can also highlight the fact that organisations with lower levels of absence usually also benefit from higher staff retention, so there are potentially wider benefits.
2. **Identify the links with corporate and HR strategies.** Increasing numbers of organisations are recognising that their people are at the centre of their organisation and make a vital contribution towards their strategic objectives. Emphasising the effect of higher attendance levels and having more committed and

satisfied employees could therefore make a useful contribution towards these objectives.

- 3. Links with accreditation such as Investors in People should be highlighted.** Effective absence management takes a holistic approach which means that absence should be considered throughout all of an organisation's HR policies. Working towards best practice and demonstrating a commitment to the well-being of employees will reflect positively on the organisation's reputation as a good employer.
- 4. Set the context of this training programme.** This comprehensive programme has been designed in such a way that it can be replicated on a regular basis so that all new managers get this essential training. The design of the programme and its accompanying resources mean that it is not time-intensive and can be delivered easily. The additional support materials allow the learners to disseminate the key messages back to their employees so that there are wider benefits.
- 5. Agree in advance how the training can be evaluated.** It is important to be realistic about the impact that this training can have on reducing the levels of absence in an organisation. Previous research has shown that after the introduction of a new intervention it can take up to two years for the impact on levels of absence to become apparent. In the short term it is likely that absence levels appear to increase slightly, this may be because absence has been under-reported in the past when managers were less familiar with the procedures and the importance of following them.
- 6. Demonstrates a commitment to the organisation's employees.** This training reinforces the need for managers to be supportive to absent employees and how they can make their return to work as comfortable as possible. This includes the investigation of strategies that can be used to enable ill employees to return to work as soon as possible, for the benefit of the employee as well as the organisation. There is also a focus on reducing non-genuine absence so that employees are only absent when they are unable to come to work. Only when the supportive avenues have been followed do we look at the links with the organisation's discipline and grievance policies.

To summarise, there are a number of tangible and intangible benefits of this training for the organisation. There are also wider benefits associated with using good practice policies and practices when managing people.

Feedback at the end of each training session should also be considered by the trainer so that it can be incorporated into future sessions. If you work in a Unionised environment it is advisable to consult with the Trade Unions as soon as management permission has been gained. The emphasis in this case should be on well-being and how the training takes a supportive approach for employees who have been absent for genuine reasons.

Overview of skills and activities

The activities in this toolkit will enable the participants to gain a holistic view on how to manage absence effectively. To maximise its potential this covers activities designed to enhance existing knowledge as well as the practical skills and confidence that are needed. The design and content of this workshop has been constructed using feedback from managers across a number of organisations to try and meet their needs. The activities encourage the learners to reflect on their current practices and consider how they could be improved further.

Section 2 Why is managing absence important? A set of group activities are presented to allow the learners to gain an understanding of why managing absence is important and the impact that it has on all of the organisation's stakeholders.

Section 3 Understanding and getting to grips with absence: Do you have a problem? Learners undertake a small number of activities to enable them to assess their current levels of absence and to plan how they should manage this part of the process in the future.

Section 4 Managing short term absences. Working in small groups, the learners will engage in activities that will support them to manage short term absences. This includes the use of practical role plays so that the learners can develop their confidence as well as their skills. These activities also reflect the fact that effective absence management is part of a holistic process so the learners will develop a range of transferable skills.

Section 5 Managing long term absences. Through the use of case studies and practical exercises, learners will enhance their understanding of the range of techniques that can be used to effectively manage long term absences.

Section 6 Practical skills for managers. A series of carefully designed activities are used to enable the managers to practice the skills that they need to manage absence on a daily basis. This includes vital issues such as *having difficult conversations*.

Section 7 Dealing with common problems. The final activities deal with specific problems that are often encountered when managers have to deal with absence cases. This provides a good conclusion to the training by dealing with any final queries.

How to get the most out of the activities

Within your sessions with the learners they may wish to share some of their previous experiences in managing periods of sickness absence. It is therefore necessary to agree some boundaries on the extent to which they should be used and to ensure that there is an agreement of confidentiality within the group.

Your participants should not feel like they are the main problem in an organisation's attempts to manage absence. The emphasis should be on being positive about how we can try and manage absence as effectively as possible in the future.

Reinforce to the participants that you are not trying to eliminate all absences! As a good employer, the organisation recognises that there will always be occasions when an employee is **unable** to come to work. When looking at reducing short-term absences we are looking to try and minimise avoidable absence, this happens when an employee is able to come to work but chooses not to. In terms of managing long term absences, the focus is on enabling them to return to work as soon as they are able, sometimes using a phased return.

It is also important that your learners realise that unfortunately you don't have a miracle cure to the absence problem, but by working through the exercises in this toolkit you will have a good start. Research has also shown us that it can take quite a long time for absence management interventions to begin to have a visible reduction in the levels of absence in the organisation, so don't expect overnight success!

Organising your training session(s)

As a trainer you can decide whether all of the activities are appropriate for the environment in which you are delivering the training. Clear guidance is given at the start of each activity so that you are clear which resources you will need and suggested timings for the activities. Copies of the handouts can be downloaded from the accompanying website; this allows you to customise them as you see appropriate.

Further resources

The following organisations provide some useful factsheets on absence:

- CIPD provide a wealth of resources on their website, including a general factsheet which is available at: www.cipd.co.uk . You can also use this page to access the latest Absence Survey which is carried out on an annual basis. CIPD, HSE and Acas collaborated to produce an absence management toolkit which is also available via the CIPD website.
- HSE have a dedicated website for sickness absence, which can be accessed via their homepage at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/>
- Acas provide a lot of general advice on absence which is available at their website: <http://www.acas.org.uk/>

Section Two: Why is managing absence important?

Tool One: Understanding the importance of managing absence

Aim

For the learners to understand why it is important that absence is managed effectively.

Rationale

Managing absence is an important task in organisations and line managers have a crucial role to play. It is therefore essential that they understand the importance of this people management task so that they can implement organisational policies and practices.

Procedure

- The duration of this task should be approximately 10-15 minutes
- Ask the learners to work in small groups to answer the questions which are provided in Worksheet 1.
- Discuss their responses as a group and then provide a copy of Handout 1 which provides a summary of the key issues

Supporting materials

Handout 1	Overview of why managing absence is important
Worksheet 1	Activity: The key issues in managing absence

Handout 1

Overview of why managing absence is important

1. Why is it important for organisations to manage absence effectively?

There are a number of financial and non-financial implications of absence for organisations. They need to provide a balance of being supportive whilst at the same time minimising absence. The overall annual cost to the economy is estimated to be over £13 billion (CBI, 2007) in direct costs. On an organisational level, the estimated cost of absence is over £600 per employee per year (CIPD, 2007a). This provides a strong rationale for organisations to try and minimise it as far as possible. Other issues include:

- Healthy employees are more productive
- To meet internal and external performance targets
- So that sick pay is not paid un-necessarily
- To obtain and maintain a reputation as a good employer
- Pressure from other stakeholders
- To present a positive image of the organisation being a good employer.

2. Who are the key stakeholders in the managing absence process?

- Line managers and senior managers
- HR
- Colleagues of absent employee
- Employees
- Trade Union representatives
- Occupational Health staff and external medical professionals i.e. GPs or Consultants

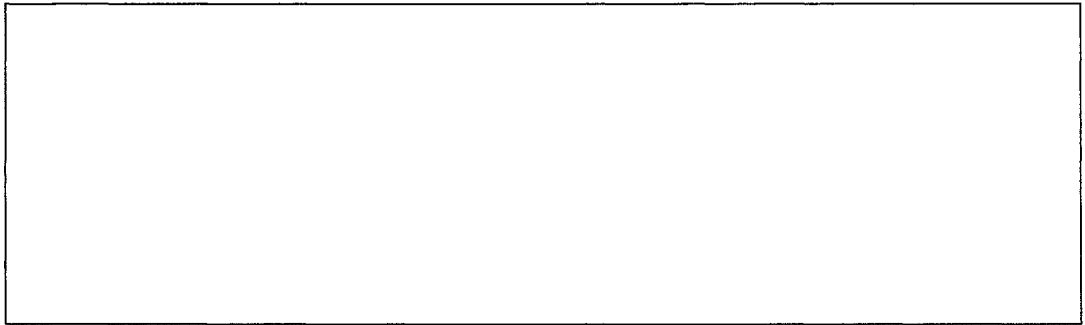
3. What are the costs involved in employee absence?

- Paying the absent employees' salary.
- Overtime costs if colleagues are providing cover
- Time taken by managers to arrange cover
- Cost of recruiting and training replacement staff
- Paying replacement staff / temporary workers
- Potential reduction of quality in service/product and levels of customer service

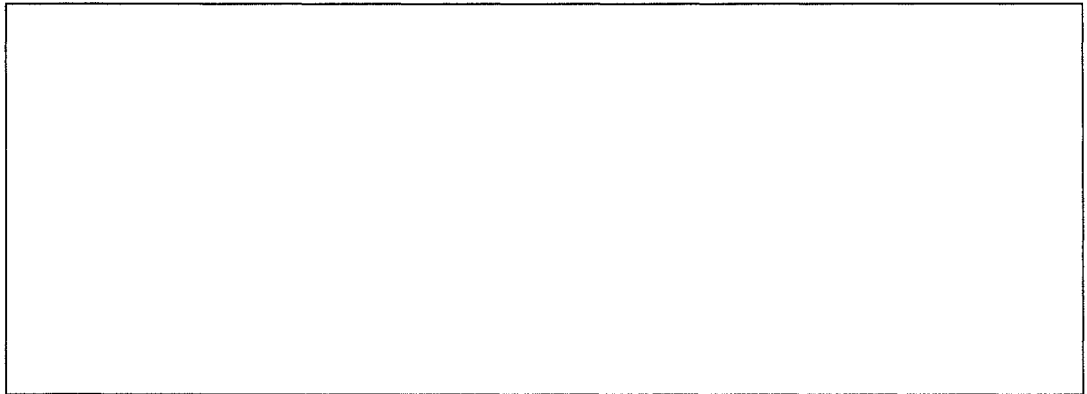
Worksheet 1

Working in small groups, answer the following questions.

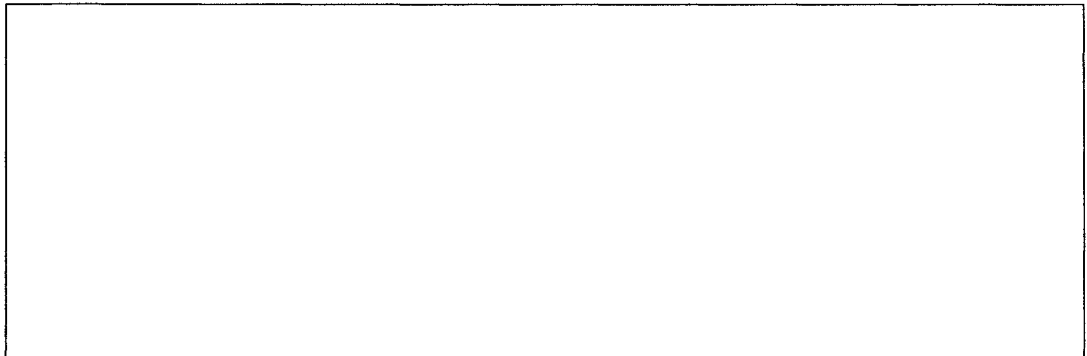
1. Why is it important for organisations to manage absence effectively?



2. Who are the key stakeholders in the managing absence process?



3. What are the costs involved in employee absence?



Section Two

Tool Two: Looking at the impact of absence on others

Aim

The learners will understand the impact that absence has on different stakeholders in the organisation.

Rationale

Absence can have an impact on a wide range of stakeholders in the organisation, this tool identifies these possible impacts.

Procedure

- The duration of this task should be approximately 15 minutes
- Divide the learners into three groups so that they can all think about the impact on a different group of stakeholders (managers, colleagues, and absent employees). If the group of learners is small, they can look at each group of stakeholders in turn.
- Ask the learners to feed back their answers
- Ask the learners to read Handout 2 and add any additional areas that were highlighted by the groups when completing Worksheet 2

Supporting materials

Handout 2	The impact of absence
Worksheet 2	Activity: The impact of absence on others

Handout 2

The impact of absence

The previous tool demonstrated the costs to the organisation when employees are absent both in financial and non-financial terms. However, we also need to recognise that absence can have an impact on different groups of people within the organisation.

What is the impact of excessive absence on managers within the organisation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They may have to cover the jobs themselves if they cannot arrange cover• Stressful when absences are unexpected• Reduces their time to carry out their normal duties• Need to make arrangements for work to be covered• Will have to complete all of the administration required for the absences which can be time consuming
What is the impact of absence on the colleagues of the absent employee?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to cover their work, which increases their workload• Increased stress levels• May reduce team spirit• May be more susceptible to illness/absence themselves• If there is a perception that not all absences are genuine, this may lead to a decrease in morale• May mean that they cannot take time off or flexi when they want to if there is insufficient cover• May fail to meet targets
What is the impact of absence on the employee who is absent?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They may be feeling mentally and /or physically ill• There may be a negative impact on their life at home• They may spread illness if they attend work when they are not fit enough (i.e. flu or contagious illnesses)• May feel worried about having to catch up with a lot of work when they return• May be worried about what their colleagues think and managers think

Worksheet 2

The impact of absence on others

Your group will be allocated on set of stakeholders (managers, colleagues, and absent employees) and you should use the box below to make notes on what you think the impact of absence is on this group.

As your trainer invites the other groups to share their thoughts on the stakeholders they have investigated, make some notes on what they have said.

Section Two

Tool Three: The benefits of attendance and how to encourage it

Aim

To understand the benefits of attendance and identify strategies that could be implemented in your organisation.

Rationale

An important part of minimising absences is to develop a culture where attendance is the norm and people attend work whenever they are able to. This tool introduces interventions that have been used successfully by organisations.

Procedure

- The duration of this task should be approximately 10-15 minutes
- Ask the learners to make a list of things that their current organisation and department do which encourages attendance. Make a note of these points on a flipchart pad
- Ask the learners to read Handout 3 and ask the learners to discuss how strong they think the business case is
- Provide a copy of Handout 4 as a reference resource for the learners
- Ask the learners to discuss the extent to which their organisation encourages attendance. Encourage them to provide examples, and consider what they could consider introducing in the future.

Supporting materials

Handout 3	The benefits of attendance
Handout 4	How to develop an attendance culture

Handout 3

The benefits of attendance

There are many advantages of having a high level of attendance for both the organisation and its stakeholders. Organisations with high attendance levels may benefit from increased employee commitment and job satisfaction and lower levels of turnover as employees are happy in their work.

From an external perspective the organisation may develop a reputation as a good employer and will be able to publicise their lower levels of absence.

Methods of encouraging attendance

A number of mechanisms have been used by organisations to encourage attendance, and this does not always have to cost a lot of money. Examples of inexpensive interventions are:

- provision of healthy food options in the organisation's canteen
- encouraging lunchtime walks by providing route maps
- encouraging employees to take the stairs rather than using the lifts
- senior management formally recognising excellent attendance by awarding certificates
- providing preferential access to overtime opportunities for those with good attendance records

Organisations should also think about what they can do looking specifically at the way in which people work, their work environment and the content of their job. The theory being that the more satisfied employees are, the less likely that they will be absent unnecessarily. Examples of interventions could include:

- training opportunities
- job rotation
- flexibility in the way that tasks are carried out
- degree of autonomy in carrying out their work
- up to date software and equipment

However, some organisations have taken a much bigger approach where there is costs (sometimes significant ones) attached to them to encourage attendance. This might include increased holiday entitlement, bonus payments, gift vouchers or entry to prize draws. Perhaps the most famous example is that of the Royal Mail, where it was reported that they gave away £500,000 worth of prizes (Personnel Today, 2005) Available at <http://www.personneltoday.com/articles/2005/05/04/29514/experts-urge-caution-over-elaborate-incentive-plans.html>

Section Two

Tool Four: The role of line managers

Aim

Line managers should understand the importance of their role in managing absence effectively.

Rationale

Managers need to be clear about what roles they need to carry out when managing absence, and when it is appropriate to involve other stakeholders.

Procedure

- The duration of this task should be approximately 20 minutes
- Ask the learners to read Handout 5
- Ask the learners to complete Worksheet 3
- Make a note of any areas where there appears to be some confusion over whom should have responsibility for the tasks, and encourage the learners to verify this with their own manager or HR contact in the organisation.
- Ask the learners to read Handout 6 and ask them to identify whether they could add anything to this list and discuss how they might use this list in the future,

Supporting materials

Handout 5	The important role of line managers
Handout 6	The role of line managers: A sample job description
Worksheet 3	Activity: scenario based

Handout 5

The important role of line managers

Common ground in the best practice literature on absence management is that line managers have a crucial role to play. This is because they have the day-to-day contact with their employees and are responsible for implementing the absence management policy on a daily basis.

If line managers do not understand their role, they are unlikely to be able to follow the organisation's policy and practices which could lead to inconsistency between managers, which is a potential problem for the organisation.

It is important that line managers have the knowledge, skills and confidence to be able to carry out their role in the managing absence process. As many managers are unlikely to have received any formal management training it is important that they receive adequate support in this area. This means participation in suitable training and then being able to request advice when dealing with new situations for the first time, or in complex cases.

One of the key problems reported by line managers is that they are not clear about what exactly they have to do and how this relates to the work that should be carried out by the HR Department. It is therefore essential that this is clear to all parties. This will also avoid certain tasks being forgotten about or for duplication of efforts.

Research has shown that line managers are most successful in managing absence when they have a clear understanding about how important minimising absence is to the organisation. This should be followed by demonstrating a clear commitment to the process and ensuring that their employees are aware of their responsibilities.

Managers should try and ensure that they apply the absence management policy consistently, for example; all return-to-work interviews should be carried out rather than just a select few. They should also try and promote a culture to their team whereby employees feel supported when they have been genuinely ill, whilst at the same time being clear that action will be taken for non-genuine absences. Leading by example is also important, so managers should ensure that they follow all of the organisation's procedures if they are absent and ensure that they participate in a return-to-work interview with their manager upon their return.

Positive managers can also try to dispel certain myths about absence management such as the fact that referrals to Occupational Health are part of a supportive process, rather than a punitive one. They may also act as a bridge between employees and HR where the existing relationship is not necessarily positive.

Handout 6

The role of line managers: A sample job description

To reflect the fact that managing absence is an important task for line managers, it is often a good idea for it to be covered explicitly within a job description.

The list below provides a number of activities that are typically carried out by line managers:

- Making sure that all new employees are aware of the absence policy and the arrangements for reporting absences
- Taking telephone calls from employees who are reporting their absence.
- Recording the absences of all employees (the day that they were first absent and the day that they returned as well as the reason for the absence)
- Carrying out return to work interviews (and making notes throughout the process)
- Liaising with HR about any problem cases
- Ensuring that the importance of attendance is highlighted to all employees
- Making referrals to Occupational Health when appropriate
- Liaising with HR and Occupational Health when agreeing on return to work arrangements for long term absentees
- Talking to employees when they hit a trigger point
- Maintaining contact with absent employees
- Reviewing absence figures for their department on a regular basis
- Rearranging the work of absent employees
- Communicating absence benchmarks and targets to the team
- Being part of the case management process if that approach is used in the organisation
- Ensuring that the relevant medical certificates are received and passed onto HR.

Worksheet 3

Working in pairs, consider the following scenario:

You have just been promoted to being a first line manager in a major electronic retailer and have received your job description which states that one of your main responsibilities will be *to manage the absences of staff in your team*. Make a list of all of the tasks that you think you will need to carry out as part of this. Use the second box to show tasks that you think should be carried out by HR staff and senior management.

Job Description for line managers

Additional absence management responsibilities	
HR staff	Senior Management

Section Two

Tool Five: An overview of the legal framework

Aim

To provide an overview of the legal framework that is relevant to effective absence management.

Rationale

Managing absence is affected by several pieces of legislation in terms of policy and practices so it is important that managers have an awareness of the key issues.

Procedure

- The duration of this task should be approximately 10 minutes
- Explain to the learners that this tool aims to provide a very brief overview of some of the key legislation in relation to managing absence. Highlight the fact that specific advice on cases should be gained from HR Department on an individual basis
- Ask the learners to read Handout 7

Supporting materials

Handout 7 An overview of the legal framework

Handout 7

An overview of the legal framework

It is likely that many of your participants will have day to day responsibility as opposed to a strategic role in managing absence, and that they will have someone in the organisation who can provide specific legal advice. However, it is important that they understand that managing absence can be covered by several different types of legislation. You must make it clear to the learners that this workshop is not legally centred (this would be a toolkit in its own right) but they need to at least have an awareness of how their actions could be interpreted.

- **Disability Discrimination Act (1995).** There are two main areas where you may need to get advice on following this Act. Firstly, employees who are absent for a reason related to their disability may be entitled to protection under the Act. For example, it may not be appropriate to use trigger points for the spells of absence which were related to the disability. Secondly, employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to support employees who have a disability. For example; this may require the purchase of specialist equipment to enable an employee to carry out their job or may require an adjustment to be made to the workplace such as the provision of a ramp or hearing loop. Other examples of adjustments mentioned in the act are:
 - allocating some of the disabled person's duties to another person;
 - transferring them to fill an existing vacancy;
 - altering their working hours;
 - assigning them to a different place of work;
 - allowing them to be absent during working hours for rehabilitation, assessment or treatment;
 - giving them, or arranging for them to be given, training;
 - acquiring or modifying equipment;
 - modifying instructions or reference manuals;
 - modifying procedures for testing or assessment;
 - providing a reader or interpreter;
 - providing supervision.

Source: OPSI (1995)

If you have an Occupational Health provider in your organisation, they will be able to provide advice as to whether this Act is relevant, and what you need to do to comply with it. Organisations can also request advice and support from Job Centre Plus (www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk).

- **Health and Safety at Work Act (1974).** Under this Act, employers have a duty to look after the health and safety of their employees whilst they are at work. This involves both preventing employees from being harmed whilst performing their duties and providing a safe environment for them to work in. This also includes making appropriate arrangements when an absent employee returns to work. In cases of long term absence this will be particularly important so that the employee is supported to carry out their duties; this may mean offering reduced duties to begin with on a phased return to work.

- **Employment Rights Act (1996) as amended.** One of the most relevant aspects is the right not to be unfairly dismissed. In relation to sickness absence, this means that employers must ensure that they adopt and follow fair procedures before dismissing employees on the grounds of sickness absence. In most organisations this route would only be taken as a final resort, after all other avenues had been pursued. This Act also stipulates the rights to maternity leave which is a type of absence which must be recorded and treated appropriately.
- **Employment Act (2002) Dispute Resolution Regulations 2004.** This Act requires organisations to demonstrate that they have followed the statutory minimum disciplinary, dismissal and grievance procedures when dealing with employees with a poor attendance record.

You may also wish to highlight the following external sources of information on relevant legislation:

- The CIPD website has an excellent factsheet on dealing with some of the legal problems associated with managing absence. This is available via the CIPD website: www.cipd.co.uk
- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) also provide some sound legal advice at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/>
- Acas provide a lot of general advice on absence which is available at: <http://www.acas.org.uk/>

Appendix 10.7

BAM full paper submission in the Human Resource Management track

Putting together the absence management jigsaw: Are effective line managers the missing piece?

Introduction

This paper presents an argument that managing absence is an important task for all organisations and that it needs to be supported by effective surrounding HR policies. This paper shows how research into this area can build upon some of the classical models of absence to make a new contribution to this field which is relevant to both academics and HR professionals. The focus is predominantly on how absence is managed within the public sector and explores a range of academic, policymaker and practitioner literatures to identify and define the key issues.

Earlier work by Robson (2007a, 2007b) has presented the argument that the role of first line managers (FLMs) is often referred to but has never been investigated explicitly in the context of absence management. As part of a Doctoral study, this paper focuses on empirical work undertaken in a Local Authority, looking at the way absence is managed and specifically whether or not FLMs may have an impact on the absence levels of their employees. The variables were identified through a review of the existing literature, a wide scope was needed to reflect the fact that the variables had not previously been investigated looking specifically at the context of sickness absence. The key over-arching hypothesis for this study is there is an association between the role and characteristics of FLMs and the levels of absence of their team.

Review of the literature

Absence is an area which impacts on all organisations regardless of sector or size. It is difficult to quantify a cost to organisations although the CBI (2006) reports the annual cost to employers is £13.2 billion which is an average cost of £531 per employee per year. Figures show public sector absence levels are consistently higher than their private sector counterparts (CIPD, 2007; CBI, 2007) and there is little contemporary research to indicate why this may be the case. To this day, researchers usually highlight the earlier work of Wooden (1990) and Vandenheuvel (1994) despite the age of the research to indicate why these differences may occur. Wooden (1990) proposes several reasons why absenteeism levels may be higher in the public sector and argues there is greater job security; the demands of the job are fundamentally different; there may be lower performance standards and there are more generous sick leave entitlements. It may be argued that some of these points are now outdated, particularly in relation to greater job security as the public sector now makes substantial use of fixed term posts. Vandenheuvel (1994) adds to this list by suggesting the high percentage of trade union members is also an influence as trade union membership has been correlated with higher average levels of sickness absence in previous studies. The nature of many of these variables suggests it is 'easier' for employees in this sector to take time off for non-genuine sickness absence with the knowledge they are less likely to be penalised. Vandenheuvel (1994) adds the interesting point that public sector organisations are more likely to employ practices which are usually associated with reducing absence but this has not led to reductions in practice. For example, public sector workers usually have greater flexibility in their working practices which would be expected to correlate with lower absence levels, but this is not usually the case. This provides an initial indication that despite using best practice in many HR areas, this does not necessarily translate into lower levels of absence.

An increased pressure to minimise absence was provided by Gershon (2004:6) as Local Authorities need to achieve £20 billion of efficiencies in public spending by 2007-2008. In addition, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2004) sets a target of reducing absence by 30% by 2010. This is also reflected in the many Government reports which have reviewed existing practices and provided recommendations for

reducing levels of absence (Cabinet Office, 2004, NAO, 2005 and NAO, 2006). This allows the generation of a very tangible business case for public sector organisations to take a strategic view in trying to reduce levels of absence. There is also evidence that many private sector organisations are now acknowledging this business case and use of targets and benchmarking is increasing significantly (CIPD, 2007).

Research into sickness absence has been prevalent over the last thirty years where research can be categorised broadly into; causes of absence; reasons for absence; and strategies to reduce levels of absence. The literature remains consistent that although a wealth of research has been carried out, most of the variables have resulted in conflicting results. When looking at the demographic variables of absent employees for example, research is inconsistent about gender where Steers and Rhodes (1978) states women are absent more often than men, whilst Bevan et al. (2004) found the opposite of these results. Similar conclusions can be found for age (Martocchio, 1989; Hackett, 1990), education (Rhodes and Steers, 1978) and marital status (Barham and Begum, 2005). A more recent trend has been to look at organisational factors such as job satisfaction (Brooke and Price, 1989); organisation commitment (Blau and Boal, 1987) and team cohesiveness (Sanders, 2004).

This research aims to combine studies into absence management with another area of relevance to HR (both theoretically and in practice) and this is the role of first line managers (FLMs) in organisations. In the last decade many HR responsibilities have been devolved to FLMs (Bond and Wise, 2003) and in earlier research Brewster and Larsen (2000) identified several reasons why this may be the case such as; cost reduction; to provide a more comprehensive approach to HRM and to place the responsibility with the people who are closest to the employees. Arroba and Wedgwood-Oppenheim (1994) suggest FLMs have traditionally been promoted as they were highly competent in carrying out their jobs, not because of their potential for managerial competence. This may mean they are not sufficiently skilled to carry out some of their HR duties.

Many authors have confirmed the important role FLMs now play in people management processes in organisations (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995) including the fact that their practices and behaviours can have a strong impact on their employees and their commitment to the organisation (Thornhill and Saunders, 1998). The role of FLMs can be very challenging due to the complexity and competing priorities which is described by Cunningham, James and Dibben (2004:273) as *"The balancing of production or service requirements, on the one hand, and compliance with organizational prescriptions as to how staff should be managed, on the other"*. This suggests that in an already complex job it is possible the pressures associated with managing absence could be seen as role overload (Dibben, James and Cunningham 2001). One of the conclusions of the highly acclaimed work of Purcell et al. (2003) which investigated the people and performance link confirms the importance of the role of FLMs and states it is the way they implement and enact policies which can make a difference. As well as highlighting the importance of the role FLMs carry out, this also reinforces the need for adequate training and support to enable the FLMs to carry out their people management responsibilities correctly (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995).

When focusing on the role of FLMs in managing absence, many reports have emphasised their vital role. Dibben et al's (2001a) public services research established the role of line managers was key across the range of organisations they investigated and this view was reinforced in the later work of McHugh (2002) who believes a definite link exists between good management practices and employee well-being. Looking specifically at public sector based research, this perception of FLMs is supported in much of the Government commissioned research (Cabinet Office, 2004) and Whitaker (2001:422) also believes *'management attitudes and behaviours'* may influence an employee's decision about whether they should attend work or be absent. There is clearly a body of evidence agreeing the role of FLMs is important, but there are also challenges associated with them having responsibility for managing absence. Some

concerns remain about the extent to which FLMs accept this as part of their role (Hayday, 2006) whilst McHugh's (2001) research established one of the key issues was the lack of consistency in the way FLMs manage absence. This is an interesting dilemma as whilst following policies is important there are also some instances whereby FLMs may need to display discretion (Bevan and Hayday, 1998). IPD (1995) argues FLMs need to be accountable for areas such as managing absence and this may remind them of the importance that should be attributed to this area. The fact that FLMs do not always feel equipped to deal with the situations they face in managing absence cases may be attributable to a lack of confidence or knowledge or be due to feelings of embarrassment (Bevan, 2003). All of the stakeholders need to have clarity in who is responsible for what and how they work together as part of the holistic approach (ANAO, 2003). This includes FLMs, middle managers, senior managers, HR and employees. It is particularly important FLMs understand their position and how they should work alongside HR (Robson, 2006) failure to do this can cause tensions amongst different groups in the organisation and makes effective management of absence very difficult. NAO (2005) also believes senior management support is crucial and their commitment to this area will help to emphasise the focus on employee well-being alongside the development of an attendance culture. McHugh's (2001) work highlighted the fact that FLMs believed that ultimately it was HR who had responsibility for policy implementation and the necessary monitoring arrangements, which is clearly an outdated approach in many organisations.

Before drawing hypotheses from related literature in this area, it is useful to discuss how this work can expand upon the work of existing models related to absence. This study intends to develop two of the classic absence models by Nicholson (1977) and Steers and Rhodes (1978) by suggesting additional variables that can be used to explore absence and attendance motivations. The classic absence study by Nicholson (1977) as illustrated in Figure 1 continues to be referenced within contemporary absence articles. This is likely to be because the model appears to demonstrate the complex nature of the factors which influence employee absence. This model suggests attendance is dependent upon a number of variables affecting the attachment and attendance motivation of the employee where attachment refers to the extent to which the employees need the regularity of their work (the need to attend).

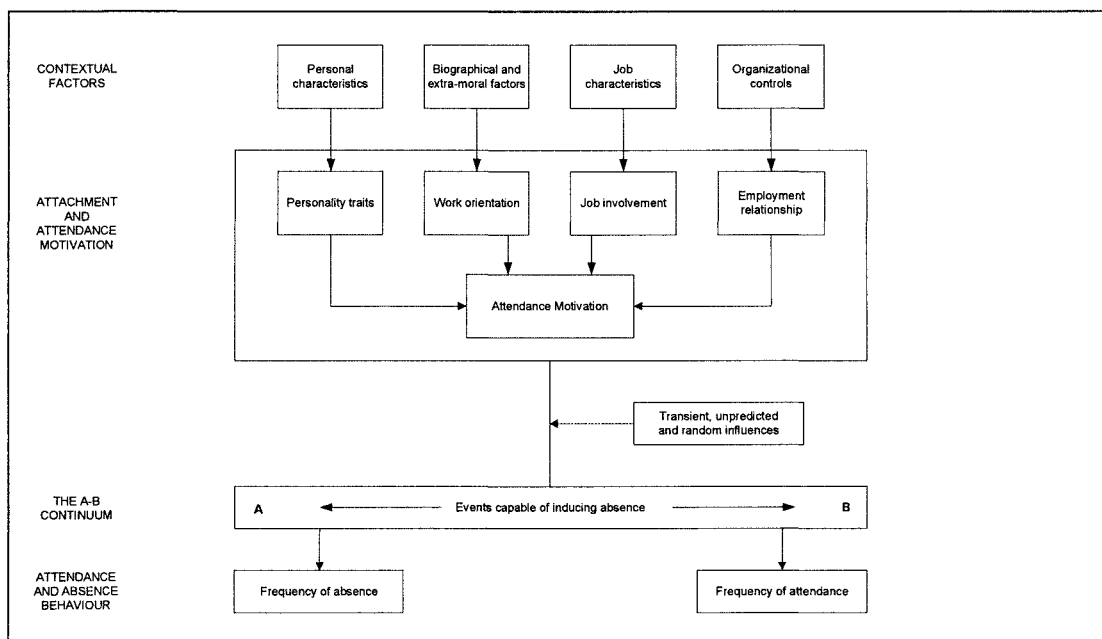


Figure 1 Nicholson's (1977:251) model of attendance motivation

A limitation of this model is it would be difficult to test in practical terms (Brooke, 1986) and is unlikely to be of use to HR managers and practitioners. One surprising omission

is 'job satisfaction', which in the past decade has been one of the most frequently used variables as can be seen in the meta-analysis by Scott and Taylor (1985). This may be a reflection of the age of the article as it is now over thirty years old and the HR agenda has changed significantly during this period. A further limitation is the model only addresses absence at the individual level and does not take into account group/team factors. Despite these potential limitations, this model is still a useful tool with which to model absence behaviour on. This paper aims to progress Nicholson's model in a number of ways. Firstly, it is suggested that it is not just the personal characteristics of the employee which may be a factor in absence; the personal characteristics of FLMs should also be investigated. The contextual factor of 'organisational controls' could also be broken down to incorporate how the role of FLMs could influence both the attachment and attendance motivation of their employees. This could include variables such as management style, relationships and levels of support with managers and how conscientious the FLMs are in carrying out their absence management responsibilities.

The absence model published by Steers and Rhodes (1978:392) a year later was developed in an attempt to draw together the findings from previous research which the authors described as: *"fitting together the array of piecemeal findings on the subject"*. As shown in Figure 2 the model consisted of a number of variables the authors believed had an impact on attendance levels. Two primary factors surrounding employee attendance were identified; motivation to attend work and ability to come to work. The model features a variable entitled job situation which encompasses leader style, but there is no further guidance on what this entails, or how this could be measured. This model could be critiqued as it is not of practical use to managers in managing absence as few of the concepts are operationalised, perhaps because this was designed with an academic audience in mind.

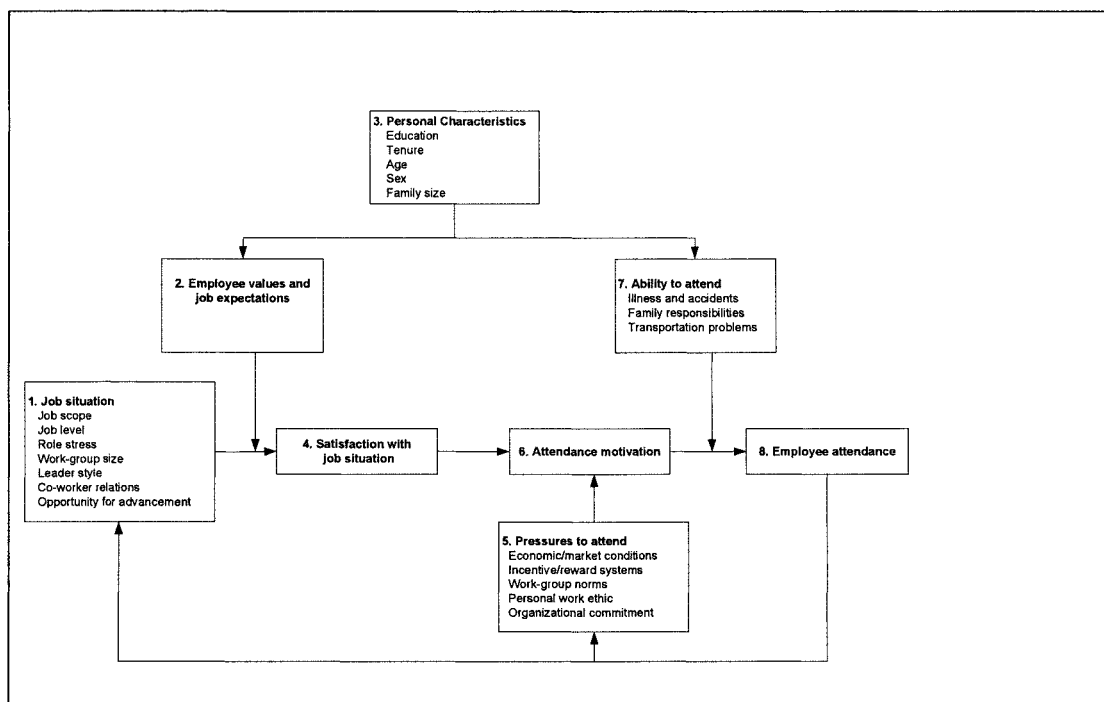


Figure 2 Steers and Rhodes (1978) model

Brooke (1986) recognised some of the strengths of Steers and Rhodes' (1978) model but expressed concerns about the lack of definitions provided for some of the labels in the model e.g. 'job scope'; particularly when the areas can consist of several sub-variables. This led to the publication of Brooke's (1986) own model which encompasses a wide range of variables and is more easily translated into practice than earlier theoretical models.

The author also provides strong justification for the inclusion of the variables and defines them clearly with reference to existing studies. Rhodes and Steers published

their revised model in 1990 (Rhodes and Steers, 1990) which addressed some of the perceived weaknesses of their previous version. This model was aimed at practitioners unlike the previous model and included increased attention to absence culture, organisational practices, societal context and perceived ability to attend. However, Harrison and Martocchio (1998) state a limitation of this model is it has had few overall tests. Looking at the model in Figure 3 it is proposed the variable entitled 'organizational practices' could be developed further to specifically include the role of FLMs. This study aims to explore this perceived gap in more detail.

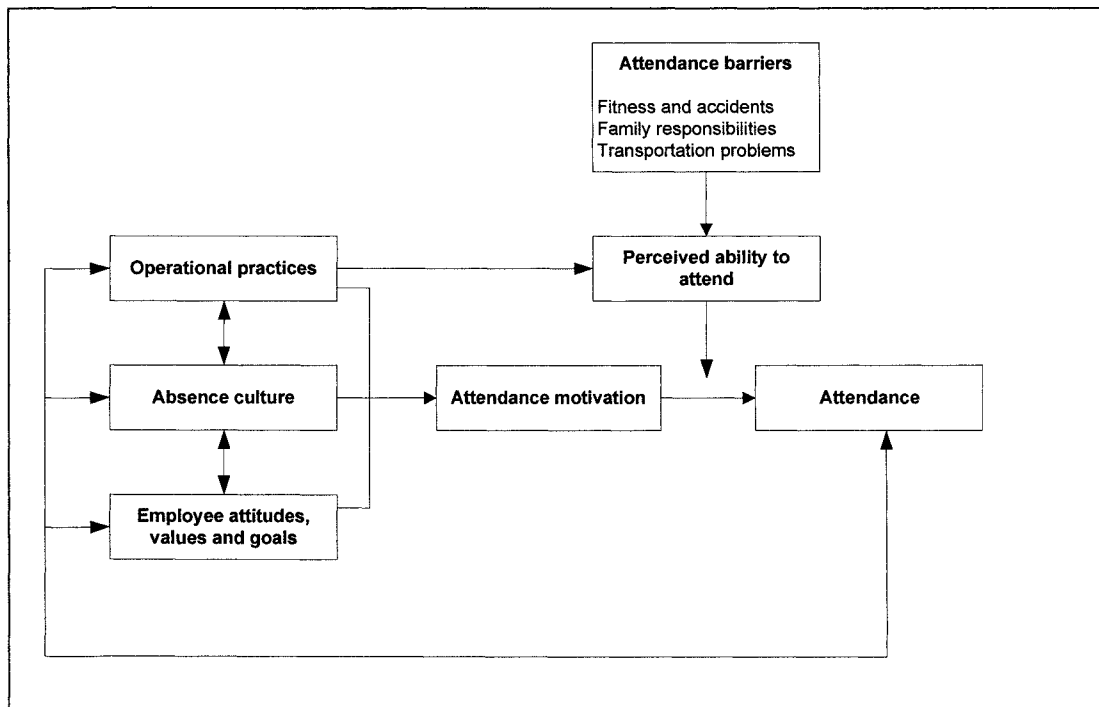


Figure 3 Rhodes and Steers (1990) model

Following on from the literature review, the model shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** was developed. Whilst there are five principal hypotheses, the model shows each hypothesis consists of a series of sub-hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: An association exists between the personal characteristics of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates.

The work of Moore et al. (2005) looks at the relationship between the gender of managers and how this is associated with absence. This study develops this concept further by looking at; age; length of service, job grade, and personal absence record. As the general literature on the changing role of FLMs suggest many FLMs are promoted as a consequence of their technical competence, a question was added to identify whether or not the respondents had previously worked in the organisation within a non-management role. Bolton (2003) discusses the difficulties in moving from colleague to boss and how this can affect the working relationships between FLMs and their former colleagues. This is a recurring issue in other public sector based research, for example in the work by Leishman and Savage (1993) and Loo and Thorpe (2004) who discovered it could be difficult for managers to manage their former colleagues.

Hypothesis 2: An association exists between the organisational characteristics in which the FLMs work in and the levels of absence of their subordinates.

Research by CIPD (2007) and CBI (2007) shows reported absence levels differ for different types of job such as manual and non-manual as well as by industry. It is therefore reasonable to assume that within the context of a Local Authority where a diverse range of roles are carried out, that this may correlate with different levels of absence. There is some existing research which implies span of control may have a relationship with levels of absence (Doran et al., 2004) which provides another hypothesis. It has also been established that part-time employees tend to have higher average levels of absence than their full time colleagues (Tuffin, 2001).

Hypothesis 3: An association exists between the general work attitudes of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates.

Work by Farrell and Stamm (1988) provides an overview of many of the existing studies carried out looking at job satisfaction and absence, the argument is broadened within this study to see whether an association with levels of absence exists. The argument with levels of organisation commitment and absence are similar (Bennett, 2002) and were investigated. A wealth of literature exists which states the importance of FLMs in accepting their people management responsibilities (i.e. Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003) with some references to the necessity when managing absence specifically (IPD, 1995). This study takes this a step further by correlating the data with levels of absence. There is also emerging literature which has identified a potential association between the management styles of FLMs and the impact on the absence levels of their employees (Johnson et al., 2003). As there is also research emphasising the need for senior management commitment (NAO, 2005) and good working relationships with HR (Robson, 2006), these factors were also investigated.

Hypothesis 4: An association exists between how knowledgeable FLMs are in relation to absence and the levels of absence of their subordinates.

McHugh (2002) believes FLMs often encounter problems in managing absence due to the fact that they are not knowledgeable about the absence policy. It is also important the FLMs have an appreciation of how the absence management policy is related to other HR policies (Bond and Wise, 2003) so it can be managed holistically in line with good practice (ANAO, 2005).

Hypothesis 5: An association exists between the attitudes towards absence of FLMs and the levels of absence of their subordinates.

Looking at the roles of FLMs it is clear that knowledge of HR and absence policies and practices is not sufficient and it is the way in which they implement them that can make a difference (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003). The confidence levels of FLMs in managing the absence process are highlighted by Dibben, James and Cunningham (2001) which justifies its inclusion as one of the key investigations within this study. As discussed in the previous narrative for hypothesis 4, absence management is most successful when it is part of a holistic approach to HRM, meaning it should be embedded into associated HR policies, therefore their confidence with these policies was also measured. A link is also proposed between the confidence of the FLMs in order to be able to manage absence and how conscientious they are in following the policies.

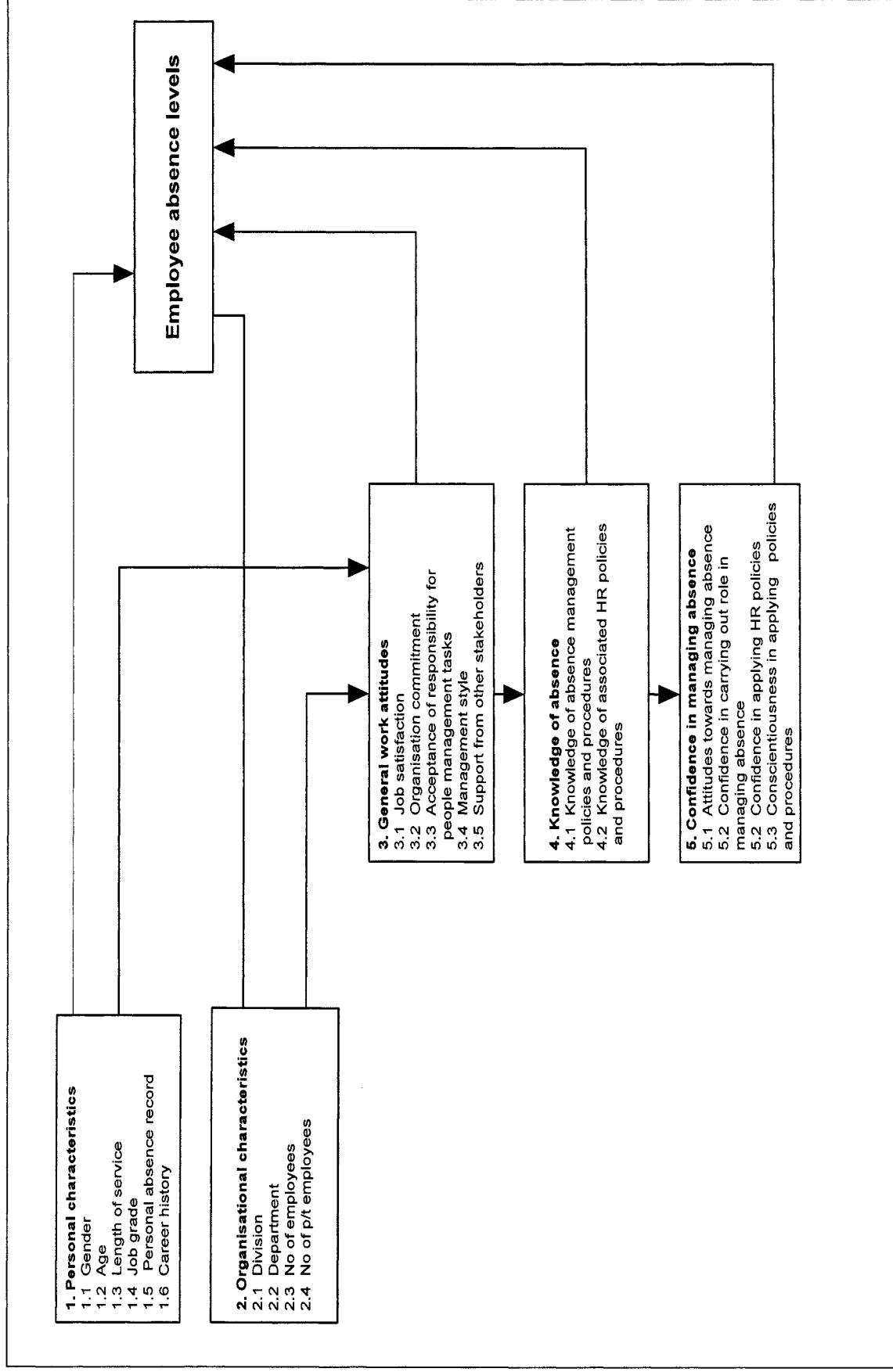


Figure 4 Conceptual model of the drivers of employee absence

Context of the research

This research took place in an English local authority which employs over 12,000 people, the majority of whom reside in the borough. For the last five years the organisation has had significantly higher levels of absence than other similar authorities and has been placed in the lowest quartile in terms of BVPI. The absence figures are reported below in Figure 5.

	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
Average number of days of absence	15.70 days	13.21 days	12.29 days	13.13 days

Figure 5 Reported absence levels (per employee per year)

The organisation has engaged in several reviews of their existing policies and practices and has invested in initiatives to try and encourage attendance. However to date this has not had a positive effect on their levels of absence. Ambitious targets have been set for absence levels in future years (see Figure 6) therefore the organisation has recognised the need to engage in more research to try and identify potential contributory factors and recommendations.

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Average number of days of absence	11.25 days	10.75 days	10.25 days	9.9 days

Figure 6 Future targets for levels of absence

Methodology

The Doctoral study from which this paper is based used a variety of research methods to provide a holistic perspective on how absence is managed within the organisation, this included analysis of organisational policies and procedures; analysis of absence data and scrutiny of organisational documents. This paper focuses specifically on the primary research carried out in the format of a survey to FLMS.

Sample

The best and worst performing departments were selected as the units of analysis for this study. Central Services (CES) as the best performing and Community Based Services (CBS) as the worst. This is despite both departments using the same policy and procedures and their managers receiving the same level of training and support. All FLMS situated in the two departments were asked to complete the survey. Due to the exact size of the FLM population being unknown within the organisation, it is necessary to refer to the estimates provided by senior HR staff within the organisation. This number was estimated to be between 200-225 FLMS within the two chosen departments. This would lead to a conservative estimate of a response rate of 44.5% (based on population of 200) or 39.55 (based on a higher population of 225). Out of the 89 responses, all of the forms were usable as they had completed the majority of the questions. All missing responses were coded appropriately when they were inputted into SPSS.

Measures

The survey was designed specifically to carry out this piece of research and covered a range of areas to allow the hypotheses to be investigated.

Personal characteristics – Respondents were asked to provide some basic demographical information (gender, age, total length of service, and job grade) by selecting the most appropriate option. Information on the appropriate job grades were obtained from the organisation to ensure the respondents were familiar with the classifications. It was also necessary to gain information on the personal absence records of the respondents so they were asked to provide both the total number of days absence they had had over a one year period, and the frequency of their absences (i.e. number of occasions of absence). Career history was identified as being important and to measure this, respondents were simply asked to state whether they had previously worked in a non-management role in the organisation. Those who did have previous non-management experience were asked to declare whether this experience was within the same department that they now work in as a FLM.

Organisational characteristics – Respondents were asked to show the Division they work in (from a list of 2) and then the Department in which they are based (from a list of 11). Numerical data was then requested for the number of employees they were responsible for, and the number of part time employees in their team.

General work attitudes – This was a substantial part of the survey and to reflect the complexity involved in measuring less tangible areas, a number of scales were employed. The variable of job satisfaction was measured using eleven items from Spector's (1994) job satisfaction survey and included items such as *"I feel that I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do"*. Each item was rated on a five point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.795.

Mowday, Steers and Porter's (1979) Organisation Commitment Questionnaire was used as the measurement tool to score organisation commitment. Eight items were adopted from the original scale and included statements such as *"I would accept almost any type of job assignment to continue working for this Council"*. The same five point response scale was used as above for job satisfaction and the scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.828.

Acceptance of responsibility for people management tasks was established by asking the respondents to respond to a number of Likert statements created by the author. This included items such as *"Line managers are not the best people to be in charge of managing absence"*. As the author could not find any one scale which measured management style in line with the aims of this study, two separate measures were used with which to test the hypothesis. Firstly respondents were asked to fourteen statements adapted from the Leader Behaviour Questionnaire by Ohio State University (1957) whereby they had to indicate how frequently they engaged in the behaviours described in the statement. An example is: *"Making group members feel at ease when I am talking to them"*. The five response categories were: always; often; occasionally; seldom and never". The scale produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.722. Following on from this, respondents were asked to provide four words which they believed described their own management style when managing the absence of their staff. The final sub-hypothesis was on the subject of the support received from other stakeholders. To measure this, respondents were asked to rate the support they received from; their immediate manager; senior management and the HR department. Support ratings consisted of three categories (good, satisfactory, poor).

Knowledge of absence – To gain an accurate account of the extent to which FLMs understand the absence management policy, the respondents were asked a question whereby they had to identify which group or groups of stakeholders had responsibility for 15 different aspects of managing absence. This was considered to be a more appropriate measure rather than relying on a single question about self-perception.

Practical issues of space on the survey meant this approach could not be used to test knowledge of the five related HR policies (equal opportunities, work-life balance, recruitment and selection, flexible working and performance management) therefore the respondents were asked to self-rate their knowledge on each of these policies.

Confidence in managing absence – Respondents were asked to rate the confidence they had in applying the five related HR policies using a three point scale. Looking specifically at rating their confidence in managing absence, a series of Likert statements were used which respondents had to rate using the five point scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree. Conscientiousness was calculated by looking at the responses to three questions on how often the FLMs carried out specific duties that they are responsible for according to the absence management policy: carrying out return-to-work interviews after every absence; carrying out sickness counselling interviews when a trigger point has been reached; and whether they regularly monitor the absence levels of their team.

Procedures

Initially a paper-based survey was sent to the organisation for distribution to all FLMs in the chosen two divisions. One of the principal challenges was identifying the target respondents and establishing lines of communication with them as the organisation did not have a system in place to be able to contact their FLMs directly. Lindsay (2005) suggests this complex process of relying on a set of 'gatekeepers' to gain access to a certain group is an under-appreciated challenge of conducting primary research. In this instance there was a reliance on a number of different gatekeepers at different levels in the organisation to forward the questionnaires so they would eventually reach their target audience. This led to the reliance on the hard copies of the questionnaires being cascaded down the line and had a negative impact on the response rate and by the time of the first deadline, very few responses had been received. Investigations within the organisation suggested many of the target respondents had not received a copy of the survey which led to the researcher trying to target the Departments directly through the use of a named contact and using external post. This approach led to a second tranche of replies being received however the overall response rate was still less than 20% and insufficient for this research. Finally the researcher developed an electronic version of the survey which was sent out using internal mailing lists (though still relying upon an element of the message being forwarded by managers). This proved to be a worthwhile development in the research and increased the response rate by over 20%.

Findings

Saunders et al. (2007) state it can be useful to look at response rates for individual questions. In this instance it is possible to generate inferences as to why some of the questions were not answered. The mean number of missing responses for each of the 103 questions contained in the survey is 2.34 which appears to be reasonable. However, three of the questions had a significantly higher non-response rate as shown in Figure 7. It should also be highlighted that 25 questions achieved a 100% response rate.

Question number	Question	Missing responses %	Potential reason for missing responses
A3	Please state which sub-department you work in e.g. Supported Housing	29.2%	As some of the Departments are small respondents may have worried about their anonymity.
B3	Over the last year what is the average number of days absence for your team?	23.6%	Past research suggests many FLMs are not aware of this figure and therefore are unable to provide it.

E1.4	Please give four words that you think describes your management style when you are managing the absence of your staff	19.1%	Question E1.4 asks for the fourth word and as there are far fewer missing responses for the first three words it is reasonable to assume they may not have been able to think of a fourth word.
------	---	-------	---

Figure 7 Questions with highest non-response rates

When looking at the composition of the respondents, the majority of them (87.5%) work within CBS with only 10.2% being from CES. This appears to be representative of the number of employees (and first line managers) within the two departments. The majority of the respondents (70.8%) are female which was expected given the high number of responses from the CBS division. The average age of the respondents was also higher than anticipated as 85.1% of the respondents were aged forty or over, which is an interesting finding. When asked about their total length of service, 73% of respondents stated they had worked at the organisation for ten years or more. In addition, more than half of the respondents (68.5%) had previously worked in a non-management role in the organisation. Of this group, 44.9% worked in the same department in which they now manage. Overall, this means the staff profile is one whereby the majority of FLMs have worked in the organisation for a relatively substantial period. This may have an impact on the extent to which they identify and understand the absence culture.

Hypothesis 1

The data analysis shows the mean number of days of absence was significantly higher for the female respondents (31.82 days) in comparison to the male respondents (28.25 days). However this is not at a statistically significant level ($p=0.51$) so we can state there is no association between the variables. When analysing the data looking at the age of the respondents and their reported levels of absence a statistically significant correlation was found ($r(66) = 0.33$, $p=0.006$). Because the correlation is positive this means older employees are generally associated with having higher reported levels of absence within their team. The actual strength of the relationship may be classed as low to medium (Cohen, 1988). Although this relationship has the potential to be practically significant as well as being statistically significant, organisations would need to be mindful of discriminating on the grounds of age within their support for FLMs. The direction of the correlation between length of service and levels of absence was positive but the relationship was not statistically significant ($r(65) = 0.09$, $p=0.426$). In addition no statistically significant relationships were found between levels of absence and job grade ($r_s(62) = -0.12$, $p=0.33$); personal absence record of the FLMs ($r(66) = -0.065$, $p=0.6$) or career history ($p=0.834$). Overall the null hypothesis had to be accepted for this hypothesis as there were only two statistically significant results within the sub-hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2

Mixed results were obtained which make it difficult to either accept or reject the null hypothesis. The results show the mean number of days of absence was significantly higher in Community Based Services (36.68 days) in comparison to Central Services (11.07 days). In this instance the difference is statistically significant ($p=0.01$) at the 1% level so we can assume there is a relationship between the Division an FLM is situated in and the levels of absence. Ten Departments were identified to include all of the FLMs employed within the Community Based Services and Central Services Departments so absence levels could be mapped to a smaller level. The data analysis shows there is a significant association between absence levels reported from across the ten Departments and it is a statistically significant difference ($p=0.02$) at the 5% level. This allows us to reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the Department in which the FLMs work and the levels of absence.

Conversely, statistically significant correlations were not found between levels of absence and number of employees or; number of part time employees and levels of absence. In summary, the overall null hypothesis had to be accepted for hypothesis two.

Hypothesis 3

Statistically significant correlations were not found with levels of job satisfaction of the FLMs and levels of absence in their team ($r(61) = 0.01, p = 0.92$.) or levels of organisation commitment ($r(65) = 0.08, p = 0.49$.) and levels of absence. Four questions within the survey focused on whether the FLMs accepted responsibility for dealing with people management (HR) and no statistically significant results were found, though it is interesting to note the response to the statement '*Line managers are not the best people to be in charge of managing absence*' where the results were $r_s(65) = -0.22, p = 0.07$. Although the result is not significant at the 5% level, it is not far away from being significant and the negatively directed result is reported as it has potentially high practical significance. Responses to the questions on management style did not find any statistically significant results.

Hypothesis 4

The results of the testing of hypothesis four highlighted some interesting results as one of the key overall issues in this study relates to the knowledge of FLMs about managing absence. The existing literature is clear that in past studies many FLMs did not accept this responsibility (Dibben, James and Cunningham, 2001) and believed absence management should be a function of the HR Department. It has also been established that a further issue relates to the FLMs not having clarity in their role in relation to managing absence and where they should be working in partnership with other stakeholders (Robson, 2006). These assumptions based on existing research mean the results shown below in Figure 8 are particularly interesting as in effect the question proved to be a test for the FLMs where they had to demonstrate their knowledge. The results show frequencies rather than percentages to reflect the fact that respondents were able to tick more than one box.

	You	Your line manager	HR Department	Senior Managers	Trade Unions	Occ Health
Ensuring that the Disability Discrimination Act is adhered to.	65	55	56	40	27	29
Monitoring absence levels across Directorates.	14	21	57	48	3	9
Ensuring that the absence policy is followed.	84	57	43	31	13	18
Making sure that all employees are aware of the council's policy.	80	40	41	37	14	9
Analysing departmental absence records	31	42	53	41	3	5
Ensuring that employees understand the impact of absence on the Council.	81	63	39	46	17	12
Monitoring individual absence records	75	45	23	15	0	3
Identifying when a trigger point has been reached.	56	34	48	13	1	2
Carrying out return-to-work interviews	86	32	5	11	0	1
Managing persistent short term absences	77	48	20	15	1	8
Managing long term absences	71	56	40	27	6	25
Encouraging good attendance	84	43	23	31	5	6
Treating all employees fairly	84	53	49	47	33	28

Advising first line managers on complex cases	44	32	46	19	7	17
Initiating advice from Occupational Health	66	51	21	14	2	17

Figure 8 Survey results showing perceived responsibilities for managing different aspects of managing absence

These results are interesting as they indicate the FLMs recognise they have a key role to play in nearly all aspects of managing absence. However, there appears to be some ambiguity over who is responsible for identifying trigger points with just over half of the respondents believing they have a responsibility for this task. The responses to most of the statements indicate the FLMs realise a partnership approach is required whereby different groups of stakeholders have to work together. It was expected that the 'HR Department' response category would have the highest frequency for many of the questions in line with past research; however this was not the case. The role of the line managers of the FLMs also appears to be more involved than previously considered with many of the statements having higher frequencies for their line manager than the HR department, for example in *ensuring that the absence policy is followed* and *managing long term absences*. This infers the role played by HR is less strong than hypothesized. After analysing these results, each respondent was allocated a score for their responses to each statement. The correct responses were identified by analysing the organisational absence policy and procedures and verifying this with one of the key informants. The responses to the statements were scored by awarding one correct point for each correct answer and subtracting one point where an incorrect response was also provided. Negative scoring was not employed so zero was the lowest possible score for each item. The maximum possible score was 47 and after the scores had been calculated they were correlated with the reported absence level for the group of employees to establish whether a relationship existed between the two sets of data. The results show there is a statistically significant relationship between the two variables which can be expressed as $r(66) = -0.241$, $p = 0.48$. The direction of the correlation is negative which signifies a high score is associated with lower levels of absence. The effect size of the correlation can be described as being small/medium (Cohen, 1988). As well as being statistically significant, the large amount of literature in this area suggests this finding is also of strong practical relevance to organisations.

Looking at the rest of the sub-hypotheses, no significant results were found between knowledge of associated HR policies and level of absence: Equal Opportunities policy ($r_s(66) = 0.12$, $p = 0.33$); Work-life balance policy ($r_s(62) = 0.16$, $p = 0.22$); Recruitment and selection policy ($r_s(65) = 0.22$, $p = 0.08$); Flexible working policy ($r_s(63) = 0.11$, $p = 0.54$) or the Performance management policy ($r_s(62) = 0.79$, $p = 0.54$). As none of the relationships are statistically significant the null hypothesis has to be accepted as there appears to be no association between knowledge of HR policies and levels of absence.

Hypothesis 5

When looking at attitudes towards managing absence as part of hypothesis 5, only one statement showed a statistically significant correlation with level of absence and this was "*Absent employees are treated quite harshly by the organisation*" where a relationship was found at the 5% level ($r_s(65) = -0.250$, $p = 0.41$). The direction of the association is negative and of small-medium strength. The tools for measuring confidence also did not show any statistically significant relationships when looking specifically at their role in managing absence ($r_s(65) = 0.17$, $p = 0.16$) or for any of the related HR policies: Equal Opportunities ($r_s(66) = 0.13$, $p = 0.32$); Work-life balance ($r_s(62) = 0.19$, $p = 0.12$); Recruitment and selection ($r_s(62) = 0.18$, $p = 0.16$); Flexible working ($r_s(61) = 0.13$, $p = 0.31$) and Performance management ($r_s(61) = 0.70$, $p = 0.59$).

Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated the relevance of managing absence to organisations; whilst the focus in this case is on the public sector it is clear that many of the results may be generalisable across other sectors. Existing research has confirmed the role of FLMs is an important piece of the managing absence jigsaw and this work allows our understanding in this area to develop further.

Whilst anecdotal evidence has consistently suggested FLMs could have an impact on the absence levels of their employees, this study has shown few of the hypotheses and sub-hypotheses found statistically significant associations between the variables and levels of absence. The key result that organisations could use for their benefit is the need for FLMs to have a sound understanding of the absence policy and procedures. This means they must understand all of the tasks contained within it and understand who has responsibility for which areas. In many instances this will require partnership working, so the boundaries will need to be clear. It is also clear that the nature of the Department in which FLMs work is associated with absence levels and this suggests differentiated support and training may be required to adapt to different contextual factors. For example those working in a Social Services area are likely to encounter more stressful situations than those performing office based tasks.

Although it is disappointing that only a small number of correlations were identified it must be remembered that from the perspective of the organisation they are also interested in issues of practical significance. This means many of the results from the descriptive statistics will be of consequence. For example, only 43.2% of respondents felt the support they received from HR was average or good and less than half of the respondents (45.5%) believed they had enough time in their normal working day to manage absence. These two examples are issues the organisation could address on both a strategic and operational level.

A limitation of this study is the number of respondents was quite low and this may explain to some extent the low number of statistically significant correlations found. There are clearly implications and suggestions for future research; this includes the proposal that the research could be replicated on a wider scale. In terms of the literature, there is clearly a gap in the knowledge regarding why absence levels differ so significantly between public and private sectors and contemporary research in this area would be warmly received.

9. References

Acas (2006) *Managing attendance and employee turnover*. Available at: <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1183> (Accessed: 15 November 2006).

Acas (2007) *Health, work and wellbeing: rising to the public sector attendance management challenge*. Available at: http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/i/3/Health_work_and_wellbeing_rising_to_the_public_sector_attendance_management_challenge_1.pdf (Accessed 15 January 2008).

Ackroyd, S. and Thompson, P. (1999) *Organizational Misbehaviour*. London: Sage.

Ahmed, S. (2008) 'E-mail policies of the 50 states: A content analysis', *Public Personnel Management*, 37(1) pp.1-13.

Akyeampong, E.B. (2007) *Trends and seasonality in absenteeism*. Available at: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/75-001-XIE/10607/art-2.pdf> (Accessed: 14 March 2008).

Alban Metcalfe, B. (1989) 'What motivates managers? An investigation by gender and sector of employment', *Public Administration*, 67, pp.95-108.

Alimo-Metcalfe, B. and Alban-Metcalfe, J. (2006) 'More (good) leaders for the public sector', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 19(4), pp.293-315.

Alker, L. and McHugh, D. (2000) 'Human resource maintenance? Organisational rationales for the introduction of employee assistance programmes', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 15(4), pp.303-323.

Allegro and Veerman (1990) 'Absenteeism', in Drenth, P.J.D., Thierry, H. and de Wolff, C.J. (eds.) *New Introduction Book of Labor and Organisation Psychology*. Deventer: Van Loghum Slaterus.

Allen, J. (2007) 'Royal Mail's reward strategy pays off'. Available at:
http://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/item/2205/pg_dtl_art_news/293/pg_ftr_art
(Accessed: 15 May 2007).

Alreck, P.L. and Settle, R.B. (1995) *The Survey Research Handbook*. 2nd edition. London: Irwin.

Altchiler, L. and Motta, R. (1994) 'Effects of aerobic and nonaerobic exercise on anxiety, absenteeism, and job satisfaction', *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 50 (6), pp.829-840.

ANAO (2003) *Absence Management in the Australian Public Service*. Available at:
[http://www.anao.gov.au/WebSite.nsf/Publications/BD2FEAB022F0A678CA256D4B000F5DFD/\\$file/Audit+Report+52.pdf](http://www.anao.gov.au/WebSite.nsf/Publications/BD2FEAB022F0A678CA256D4B000F5DFD/$file/Audit+Report+52.pdf) (Accessed: 9 August 2007).

Anderson, V. (2008) *Research Methods in Human Resource Management*. London: CIPD.

Appleton, J.V. and Cowley, S. (1997) 'Analysing clinical practice guidelines. A method of documentary analysis', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 25(5), pp.1008-1017.

Argyle, M., Gardner, G. and Cioffi, F. (1958) 'Supervisory methods related to productivity, absenteeism, and labour turnover', *Human Relations*, 11, pp.23-40.

Arnott, J and Emmerson, K. (2001) *In sickness and in health: Reducing sickness absence in the police service*. Available at:
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/prgpdfs/prs143bn.pdf> (Accessed: 10 April 2007).

Arroba, T. and Wedgwood-Oppenheim, F. (1994) 'Do senior managers differ in the public and private sector: An examination of team role preferences', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 9(1), pp.13-16.

Audit Commission (2001) *Sickness absence management and payment arrangements: Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council*. Available at: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/accessible.asp?ProdID=0374C6CB-A806-4008-BF6C-BA1EAA2AF715> (Accessed: 20 November 2008).

Audit Commission (2005) *Local Authority Performance Indicators (England) PI Reference Guide 2004/05*. Available at: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/performance/downloads/2004-05ReferenceGuide.pdf> (Accessed: 10 March 2008).

Audit Commission (2006) *Corporate Assessment: Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council*. Available at: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/CPA-CORP-ASSESS-REPORT/03F5A576-FBE2-400B-A397-4C4E793ACC25/GatesheadMBCCorporateAssessment14Aug06REP.pdf> (Accessed: 9 August 2007).

Ault, R.W., Ekelund, R.B., Jackson, J.D., Saba, R.S. and Saurman, D.S. (1991) 'Smoking and absenteeism', *Applied Economics*, 23, pp.743-754.

Australian Public Service Commission (2006) *Fostering an attendance culture: A guide for APS agencies*. Available at: <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications06/fosteringattendance.htm> (Accessed: 9 August 2007).

Avery, R.B. and Hotz, V.J. (1984) 'Statistical models for analyzing employee behavior' in Goodman, P.S. and Atkin, R.S. (ed.) *Absenteeism*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Babin, B. J. and Boles, J.S. (1996) 'The effects of perceived co-worker involvement and supervisor support on service provider role stress, performance and job satisfaction', *Journal of Retailing*, 72(1), pp.57-75.

Bach, S. (2000) *HR and new approaches to public sector management: Improving HR capacity*. Available at: http://www.who.int/hrh/en/Improving_hrm_capacity.pdf (Accessed: 19 November 2008).

Baker, M. J. (2003) *Business and Management Research: How to complete your research project successfully*. Argyll: Westburn Publishers Ltd.

Bakker, A.B., Demerouti, E., de Boer, E. and Schaufeli, W.D. (2003) 'Job demands and job resources as predictors of absence duration and frequency', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 6(2), pp.341-356.

Balchin, J. and Wooden, M. (1995) 'Absence penalties and work attendance', *The Australian Economic Review*, 28(4), pp.43-58.

Balloch, S; Andrew, T; Ginn, J; McLean, J and Williams, J. (1995). *Working in the Social Services*. London: National Institute for Social Work.

Balnaves, M. and Caputi, P. (2001) *Introduction to Quantitative Research Methods: An investigative approach*. London: Sage Publications.

Baptiste, N.R. (2008) 'Tightening the link between employee well-being at work and performance: A new dimension for HRM', *Management Decision*, 46(2), pp.284-309.

Barham, C. and Begum, N. (2005) *Sickness absence from work in the UK*.

Available at:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/labour_market_trends/sick_absence_Apr05.pdf (Accessed: 12 January 2006).

Barham, C. and Leonard, J. (2002) *Trends and sources of data on sickness absence*. Labour market trends. London: Office for National Statistics.

Barmby, T., Nolan, M. and Winkelmann, R. (2001) 'Contracted workdays and absence', *The Manchester School*, 69(3), pp.269-275.

Barrows, D. and Wesson, T. (2001) *A comparative analysis of job satisfaction among public and private sector professionals*. Available at:

<http://www.innovation.cc/peer-reviewed/job-satisfaction2.htm#Pre-Testing> (Accessed: 19 November 2008).

Baruch, Y. (1999) 'Response rates in academic studies: A comparative analysis', *Human Relations*, 52(4), pp.421-438.

Beck, K. and Wilson, C. (2000) 'Development of affective organizational commitment: A cross sequential examination of change', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 56(1), pp.114-136.

Bennett, H. (2002) 'Employee commitment: the key to absence management in local government?', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 23(8), pp. 430-441.

Bevan, S. (2003) *Attendance Management*. London: The Work Foundation.

Bevan, S., Dench, S., Harper, H. and Hayday, S. (2004) *Employment Relations Research Series No 25: How employers manage absence*. London: Department for Trade and Industry.

Bevan, S. and Hayday, S. (1998) *Attendance Management: A review of good practice*. London: Institute for Employment Studies.

BITC (2007) *Wealth from Health: Health+People=Results*. Available at: http://www.bitc.org.uk/resources/publications/wealth_from_health.html (Accessed: 10 April 2008).

Black, C (2008) *Working for a healthier tomorrow*. London: The Stationery Office.

Blau, G. J. and Boal, K. B. (1987) 'Conceptualizing how job involvement and organizational commitment affect turnover and absenteeism', *Academy of Management Review*, 12(2), pp.288-300.

Bockerman, P. and Ilmakunnas, P. (2008) 'Interaction of working conditions, job satisfaction and sickness absences: Evidence from a representative sample of employees', *Social Science and Medicine*, 67, pp.520-528.

Bolton, S. C. (2003) 'Multiple roles? Nurses as managers in the NHS', *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 16(2), pp.122-130.

Bond, S. and McCracken, M. (2005) 'The importance of training in operationalising HR policy', *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 29(3), pp.246-260.

Bond, S. and Wise, S. (2003) 'Family leave policies and devolution to the line', *Personnel Review*, 32 (1), pp.58-72.

Boyar, S.L., Maertz, C.P. and Pearson, A.W. (2005) 'The effects of work–family conflict and family–work conflict on nonattendance behaviors', *Journal of Business Research*, 58(7), pp.919-925.

Boyne, G., Jenkins, G. and Poole, M. (1999) 'Human resource management in the public and private sectors: An empirical comparison', *Public Administration*, 77(2), pp.407-420.

Boyne, G.A. (2002) 'Public and private management: What's the difference?', *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(1), pp.97-122.

Bredin, K. and Soderlund, J. (2007) 'Reconceptualising line management in project-based organisations: The case of competence coaches at Tetra Pak', *Personnel Review*, 36(5), pp.815-833.

Brewster, C. and Larsen, H.H. (2000), 'Responsibility in human resource management', in Brewster, C. and Larsen, H.H. (eds.) *Human Resource Management in Northern Europe: Trends, Dilemmas, and Strategy*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Brewster, C. and Soderstrom, M. (1994) 'Human resources and line management', in Brewster, C. and Hegewisch, A. (eds.) *Policy and Practice in European Human Resource Management*, London: Routledge.

Brooke, P. and Price, J. (1989) 'The determinants of employee absenteeism: An empirical test of a causal model', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 62(1), pp.1-19.

Brooke, P. P. (1986) 'Beyond the Rhodes and Steers model of employee attendance', *Academy of Management Review*, 11(2), pp.345-361.

Brookfield, D. (2000) 'Management styles in the public sector', *Management Decision*, 38(1), pp.13-18.

Bryman, A. (2001) *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2004) *Social Research Methods*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2003) *Business Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Budhwar, P.S. (2000) 'Evaluating levels of strategic direction and devolvment of human resource management in the UK', *Personnel Review*, 29(1/2), pp.141-157.

Bunning, R.L. (2000)'Ensuring effectiveness in our front-line leaders', *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 32(3), pp.99-105.

Burdorf, A., Post, W. and Bruggeling, T. (1996) 'Reliability of a questionnaire on sickness absence with specific attention to absence due to back pain and respiratory complaints', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 53(1), pp.58-62.

Burton, J.P., Lee, T.W. and Holtom, B.C. (2002) 'The influence of motivation to attend, ability to attend, and organizational commitment on different types of absence behaviors', *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 14(2), pp.181-197.

Butterfield, R., Edwards, C. and Woodall, J. (2005) 'The new public management and managerial roles: the case of the Police Sergeant', *British Journal of Management*, 16, pp.329-341.

Bycio, P. (1992) 'Job performance and absenteeism: A review and meta - analysis', *Human Relations*, 45(2), pp.193-220.

Cabinet Office (1998) *Working well together: Managing attendance in the public sector*. Available at: <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/eeg/1998/working.pdf> (Accessed: 12 January 2006).

Cabinet Office (2004) *Managing sickness absence in the public sector: A joint review by the Ministerial Task Force for Health, Safety and Productivity and the Cabinet Office*. London: Health and Safety Executive.

Caverley, N., Cunningham, J.B. and MacGregor, J.N. (2007) 'Sickness presenteeism, sickness absenteeism, and health following a restructuring in a public service organization', *Journal of Management Studies*, 44(2), pp.304-319.

CBI (2007) *Attending to absence: CBI/AXA absence and labour turnover survey 2007*. London: CBI.

CBI (2008) *At work and working well? CBI/AXA absence and labour turnover survey 2008*. London: CBI.

Chadwick-Jones, J. K., Brown, C.A., Nicholson, N. and Sheppard, C. (1971) 'Absence measures: their reliability and stability in an industrial setting', *Personnel Psychology*, 24(3), pp.463-470.

Chadwick-Jones, J.K., Brown, C.A. and Nicholson, N. (1973) 'Absence from work: It's meaning, measurement and control', *International Review of Applied Psychology*, 22 (2), pp.137-155.

Chadwick-Jones, J.K., Nicholson, N. and Brown, C. (1982) *Social psychology of absenteeism*. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Chatterji, M. and Tilley, C.J. (2002) 'Sickness, absenteeism, presenteeism, and sick pay', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 54, pp.669-687.

Chang, H-W and Lin, G. (2008) 'Effect of personal values transformation on leadership behaviour', *Total Quality Management and Business Excellence*, 19(1/2), pp.67-77.

Chojnacki, A. (2008) *Absence special: models for managing absence - that's the way to do it*. Available at:
<http://www.personneltoday.com/articles/2008/05/16/45842/absence-special-models-for-managing-absence-thats-the-way-to-do-it.html> (Accessed: 5 July 2008).

CIPD (2003) *Employee absence 2003: A survey of management policy and practice*. London: CIPD.

CIPD (2007a) *Absence Management: Annual survey report 2007*. London: CIPD.

CIPD (2007b) *Absence measurement and management*. Available at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/hrpract/absence/absncman.htm?lsSrchRes=1> (Accessed: 10 May 2007).

CIPD (2007c) *Employment Law FAQs: Absence management*. Available at: http://www.cipd.co.uk/EmploymentLaw/FAQ/_Absence/Absence.htm (Accessed: 10 May 2007).

CIPD (2007d) *HR policies and procedures: why introduce them?* Available at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/hrpract/general/hrpolproc-why.htm> (Accessed: 10 May 2007).

CIPD (2007e) *Learning and the line: the role of line managers in training, learning and development*. Available at: http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/maneco/general/_lrngln.htm (Accessed: 10 May 2007).

CIPD (2007f) *Rewarding work: the vital role of line managers*. Available at: http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/pay/general/_rwrngwrk.htm (Accessed: 10 May 2007).

CIPD (2008a) *Stress at work*. Available at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/health/stress/stress.htm> (Accessed: 16 June 2008).

CIPD (2008b) *Absence Management: Annual survey report 2008*. London: CIPD.

Coffey, C. and Dugdill, L. (2006) 'Policies alone are not enough: Workplace health development in the public, private and voluntary sectors', *Critical Public Health*, 16(3), pp.233-243.

Cohen, A. (2000) 'The relationship between commitment forms and work outcomes: A comparison of three models', *Human Relations*, 53(3), pp.387 – 417.

Cohen, J. (1988) *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. 2nd ed. New Jersey: Erlbaum.

Collis, J. and Hussey, R. (2003) *Business Research: A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students*. 2nd edn. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Community Care (2006) *Social care workforce*. Available at: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2008/06/30/104621/social-care-workforce.html> (Accessed: 10 June 2008).

Conley, R. E. and Baggett, M.C. (1990) 'Policy analysis - Dekalb County's sick leave incentive program', *Public Personnel Management*, 19(3), pp.345-363.

Conlon, E. J. and Stone, T.H. (1992) 'Absence schema and managerial judgment', *Journal of Management*, 18(3), pp.435-454.

Coomber, R. (1997) *Using the Internet for Survey Research*. Available at: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/2/2/2.html> (Accessed: 1 October 2007).

Cooper, H. (1998) *Synthesizing Research: A guide for Literature Reviews*. London: Sage Publications.

Cowton, C. J. (1998) 'The use of secondary data in business ethics research', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17, pp.423-434.

Crawford, S. (2002) 'Evaluation of web survey data collection systems', *Field Methods*, 14(3), pp.307-321.

Crotty, M. (2005) *The foundations of social research: meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage.

Cunningham, I. and Hyman, J. (1995) 'Transforming the HR vision into reality: The role of line managers and supervisors in implementing change', *Employee Relations*, 17(8), pp.5-20.

Cunningham, I. and Hyman, J. (1999) 'Devolving human resource responsibilities to the line: Beginning of the end or a new beginning for personnel?', *Personnel Review*, 28(1/2), pp.9-27.

Cunningham, I. and James, P. (2000) 'Absence and return to work: towards a research agenda', *Personnel Review*, 29(1), pp.33-47.

Cunningham, I., James, P. and Dibben P. (2004) 'Bridging the gap between rhetoric and reality: Line managers and the protection of job security for ill workers in the modern workplace', *British Journal of Management*, 15, pp.273-290.

Cunningham, I; James, P and Dibben P (2006) 'Tensions in Local Government Employment Relationships: The case of long-term sickness absence.' *Public Management Review*, 8(2), pp.207-225.

CVOS Committee (2005a) *Meeting held on 28th February 2005*. Available at: <http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-1378> (Accessed 20 January 2006).

CVOS Committee (2006a) *Meeting held on 16th October 2006*. Available at: <http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-2102> (Accessed: 1 January 2007).

CVOS Committee (2007a) *Meeting held on 16th April 2007*. Available at: <http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-2281> (Accessed 26 April 2007).

Dale, A., Arber, S. and Procter, M. (1988) *Doing Secondary Analysis*. London: Unwin Hyman Limited.

Dalton, D. R. and Todor, W.D. (1993) 'Turnover, transfer, absenteeism: An interdependent perspective', *Journal of Management*, 19(2), pp.193-219.

DCLG (2008) '*Compare performance by Authority*' Available at: <http://www.bvpi.gov.uk/pages/QueryResults.asp> (Accessed: 15 May 2008).

Deery, S. J., Erwin, P.J., Iverson, R.D. and Ambrose, M. L. (1995) 'The determinants of absenteeism: evidence from Australian blue-collar employees', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 6(4), pp.825-848.

DeGroot, T. and Kiker, D.S. (2003) 'A meta-analysis of the non monetary effects of employee health management programs', *Human Resource Management*, 42(1), pp.53-69.

de Vroome, E. (2006) *Prevalence of sickness absence and 'presenteeism'*. Available at: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/2006/07/NL06070191.htm> (Accessed: 10 December 2008).

Department of Health (2000) *Improving Working Lives Standard*. Available at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4010416 (Accessed: 7 February 2007).

de Vaus, D. (2002) *Surveys in Social Research*. 5th edition. London: Routledge.

de Ruyter, A., Kirkpatrick, I., Hoque, K., Lonsdale, C. and Malan, J. (2008) 'Agency working and the degradation of public service employment: The case of nurses and social workers', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(3), pp.432-445.

Dibben, P., James, P. and Cunningham, I. (2001a) 'Absence management in the public sector: An integrative model?' *Public Money and Management*, 21(4), pp.55-60.

Dibben, P., James, P. and Cunningham, I. (2001b) *Absence Management in the Public Services: Recent evidence from the UK: Fifth International Research Symposium on Public Management*. 9-11 April 2001.

Dillman, D. A. (2000) *Mail and Internet Surveys*. 2nd edn. New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc.

Dillman, D. A. and Christian, L.M. (2005) 'Survey mode as a source of instability on responses across surveys', *Field Methods*, 17(1), pp.30-52.

Doran, D; Sanchez McCutcheon, A; MacMillian, K, McGillis Hall, L; Pringle, D; Smith, S and Valente, A. (2004) *Impact of the Manager's Span of Control on Leadership and Performance*. Ontario: Canadian Health Services Research Foundation.

DPP (2008) *Dealing with sickness and absence: A guide for all employers*.

Available at:

http://www.dpp.org.uk/media/images/Dealingwithsicknessandabsence_aguideforallemmployers_458.pdf (Accessed: 10 July 2008).

Drago, R. and Wooden, M. (1992) 'The determinants of labor absence: Economic factors and workgroup norms across countries', *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 45(4), pp.764-778.

Duffield, C., Moran, P., Beutel, J., Bunt, S., Thornton, A., Wills, J., Cahill, P. and Franks, H. (2001) 'Profile of first-line managers in New South Wales, Australia, in the 1990s', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 36(6), pp.785-793.

Dunn, C. and Wilkinson, A. (2002) 'Wish you were here: Managing absence', *Personnel Review*, 31(2), pp.228-246.

Durand, V. M. (1985) 'Employee absenteeism: A selective review of antecedents and consequences', *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, 7(1/2), pp.135-167.

Dwyer, D.J. and Ganster, D.C. (1991) 'The effects of job demands and control on employee attendance and satisfaction', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 12, pp.595-608.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Lowe, A. (2002) *Management Research*. 2nd edition. London: Sage.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., Jackson, P. and Lowe, A. (2008) *Management Research: Theory and Practice*. 3rd edition. London: Sage.

Edwards, P.K.(1982) *Social Organization and Industrial Conflict*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Edwards, P. and Whitston, C. (1989) 'Industrial discipline, the control of attendance and the subordination of labour: towards an integrated analysis', *Work, Employment and Society*, 3(1), pp.1-28.

Edwards, P., Roberts, I., Clarke, M., DiGuseppi, C., Pratap, S., Wentz, R. and Kwan, I. (2002) 'Increasing response rates to postal questionnaires: systematic review', *British Medical Journal*, 324 (7347), pp.1183-1190.

EEF (2005) *Absence and Labour Turnover Survey: EEF 2005 Survey of absence costs*. London: EEF.

Eisenhardt, K.M. (1991) 'Better stories and better constructs: The case for rigor and comparative logic', *Academy of Management Review*, 16(3), pp.620-627.

Elangovan, A.R. and Xie, J.L. (2000) 'Effects of perceived power of supervisor on subordinate work attitudes', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 21(6), pp.319-328.

Employers Organisation (2005a). *Sickness Absence in Social Services 2004/05*. Available at: <http://www.lge.gov.uk/lge/aio/55060> (Accessed: 1 January 2007).

Employers Organisation (2005b) *Sickness absence in local government 2004-2005*. Available at: <http://www.lgar.local.gov.uk/lgv/aio/12684> (Accessed: 30 November 2005).

Erickson, R.J., Nichols, L. and Ritter, C. (2000) 'Family influences on absenteeism: Testing an expanded process model', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 57, pp.246-272.

Evans, A., Walters, M. and Palmer, S. (2002) *From absence to attendance*. London: CIPD.

Farrell, D. and Stamm, C.L. (1988) 'Meta-Analysis of the correlates of employee absence', *Human Relations*, 41(3), pp.211-277.

Feeney, A., North, F., Head, J., Canner, R. and Marmot, M. (1998) 'Socioeconomic and sex differentials in reason for sickness absence from the Whitehall II study', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 55, pp.91-98.

Ferlie, E., Ashburner, L., Fitzgerald, L. and Pettigrew, A. (1996) *The New Public Management in Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fricker, R. D. and Schonlau, M. (2002) 'Advantages and disadvantages of internet research surveys: Evidence from the literature', *Field Methods*, 14(4), pp.347-367.

Furnham, A. and Miller, T. (1997) 'Personality, absenteeism and productivity', *Personality and individual differences*, 23(4), pp.705-707.

Garcia, R.L. (1987) 'Sick-time usage by management and professional employees in the public sector', *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 7(3), pp.45-59.

Garrison, K.R. and Muchinsky, P.M. (1977) 'Evaluating the concept of absentee-proneness with two measures of absence', *Personnel Psychology*, 30(3), pp.389-393.

Gaudine, A.P. and Saks, A.M. (2001) 'Effects of an absenteeism feedback intervention on employee absence behaviour', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 22(1), pp.15-29.

Gellatly, I.R. (1995) 'Individual and group determinants of employee absenteeism: test of a causal model', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 16, pp.469-485.

Gellatly, I.R. and Luchak, A.A. (1998) 'Personal and organizational determinants of perceived absence norms', *Human Relations*, 51(8), pp.1085-1102.

Gershon, P. (2004) *Releasing resources to the front line: Independent review of public sector efficiency*. London: The Stationery Office.

Geurts, S. A., Schaufeli, W.B. and Buunk, B.P. (1993) 'Social comparison, inequity, and absenteeism among bus drivers', *European Work and Organizational Psychologist*, 3(3), pp.191-203.

Gilbreath, B. and Montesino, M.U. (2006) 'Expanding the HRD role: Improving employee well-being and organizational performance', *Human Resource Development International*, 9(4), pp.563-571.

Gilmore, D.C., Ferris, G.R., Dulebohn, J.H. and Harrell-Cook, G. (1996) 'Organizational politics and employee attendance', *Group and Organization Management*, 21(4), pp.481-494.

GMBC (2003) *Key census statistics*. Available at:
<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/People%20and%20Living/genie/census/keycensusstats.aspx> (Accessed: 29 January 2008).

GMBC (2004a) *Gateshead profile*. Available at:
<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/documentlibrary/people/genie/gatesheadprofile.pdf> (Accessed: 29 January 2008).

GMBC (2004b) *Census 2001 ward factsheet: Birtley*. Available at:
<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/DocumentLibrary/People/genie/census/factsheets/june2004/Birtley%20Jun04.pdf> (Accessed: 29 January 2008).

GMBC (2005a) *Corporate Vitality service Improvement Report 2004-05*. Available at:
<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/DocumentLibrary/council/strategy/annualreport/ServiceImprovement/CV%20Internet.pdf> (Accessed: 29 January 2008).

GMBC (2005b) *Corporate Improvement Plan 2005-06*. Available at:
<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/DocumentLibrary/council/strategy/improvementplan/improvement.pdf> (Accessed 10 March 2006).

GMBC (2006a) *Learning and Development Framework*. Gateshead: Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council.

GMBC (2006b) *Celebrating Gateshead: Annual Report 2005-2006*. Available at:
<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/DocumentLibrary/council/strategy/bvpp0506/fullannualreport.pdf> (Accessed: 29 January 2008).

GMBC (2006c) *Absence management procedure*. Gateshead: Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council.

GMBC (2006d) *Employee survey results*. Gateshead: Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council.

GMBC (2007a) '*Corporate Vitality 2006/07 Report*'. Available at:
<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/DocumentLibrary/council/strategy/annualreport/2006-2007/Section2%20AA%20Corporate%20Vitality.pdf> (Accessed: 29 January 2008).

GMBC (2007b) *Corporate Plan 2007-2010*. Available at:
<http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-18708>
(Accessed: 29 January 2008).

GMBC (2007c) *Gateshead Council Constitution, 7th edition*. Available at:
<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/DocumentLibrary/council/strategy/Constitution/Constitution.pdf> (Accessed: 29 January 2008).

GMBC (2007d) *Your Gateshead*. Available at:
<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/DocumentLibrary/council/strategy/annualreport/2006-2007/Section1%20Corporate%20Gateshead%20Information.pdf> (Accessed: 29 January 2008).

Goldberg, C.B. and Waldman, D. (2000) 'Modelling employee absenteeism: testing alternative measures and mediated effects based on job satisfaction', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 21(6), pp.665-676.

Goodhew, G.W., Cammock, P.A. and Hamilton, R.W. (2008) 'The management of poor performance by front-line managers', *Journal of Management Development*, 27(9), pp.951-962.

Grainger, G., Bird, L. and Harvey, J. (2004) *Management styles and characteristics of local authority housing benefit managers*. Available at:
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2003-2004/rrep218.pdf> (Accessed: 10 February 2008).

Grinyer, A. and Singleton, V. (2000) 'Sickness absence as risk-taking behaviour: A study of organisational and cultural factors in the public sector', *Health, Risk and Safety*, 2(1), pp.7-21.

Hackett, R.D. and Guion, R.M. (1985) 'A re-evaluation of the absenteeism - job satisfaction relationship.' *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, 35, pp.340-381.

Hackett, R.D. (1989) 'Work attitudes and employee absenteeism: A synthesis of the literature.' *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 62, pp.235-248.

Hackett, R.D., Bycio, P. and Guion, R.M. (1989) 'Absenteeism amongst hospital nurses: An idiographic longitudinal analysis', *Academy of Management Journal*, 32(2), pp.424-453.

Hackett, R.D. (1990) 'Age, tenure and employee absenteeism', *Human Relations*, 43(7), pp. 601-619.

Hackett, R.C. and Bycio, P. (1996) 'An evaluation of employee absenteeism as a coping mechanism among hospital nurses, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 69(4), pp.327-338.

Hakim, C. (1982) *Secondary Analysis in Social Research*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Hales, C. (2001) 'Does it matter what managers do?', *Business Strategy Review*, 12(2), pp.50-58.

Hales, C. (2005) 'Rooted in supervision, branching into management: Continuity and change in the role of first-line manager', *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(3), pp.471-504.

Hales, C. (2007) 'Structural contradiction and sense-making in the first-line manager role', *Irish Journal of Management*, 28(1), pp.147-179.

Halpin, A.W. (1957) *Manual for the leader behavior description questionnaire*. Available at:

<http://fisher.osu.edu/supplements/10/2862/1957%20LBDQ%20MANUAL.pdf>
(Accessed: 20 May 2007).

Hammer, T.H. and Landau, J. (1981) 'Methodological issues in the use of absence data', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 66(5), pp.574-581.

Hanson, D. and Grimmer, M. (2007) 'The mix of qualitative and quantitative research in major marketing journals: 1993-2002', *European Journal of Marketing*, 41(1/2), pp.58-70.

Harney, B. and Jordan, C. (2008) 'Unlocking the black-box: line managers and HRM – Performance in a call centre context', *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 57(4), pp.275-296.

Harris, L. (1999) 'Employment law and human resourcing – challenges and constraints', in Leopold, J., Harris, L. and Watson, T. (eds), *Strategic Human Resourcing: Principles, Perspectives and Practices in HRM*, London: Financial Times.

Harris, L., Doughty, D. and Kirk, S. (2002) 'The devolution of HR responsibilities: perspectives from the UK public sector', *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 26(5), pp.218-229.

Harris, R., Kelly, D., Hunt, J.A., Plant, H., Kelley, K., Richardson, A. and Sitzia, J. (2008) 'Accessing elite nurses for research: Reflections on the theoretical and practical issues of telephone interviewing', *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 13(3), pp.236-248.

Harrison, D.A. and Martocchio, J.J. (1998) 'Time for absenteeism: A 20-year review of origins, offshoots, and outcomes', *Journal of Management*, 24(3), pp.305-350.

Harrison, D. A. and Price, K.H. (2003) 'Context and consistency in absenteeism: studying social and dispositional influences across multiple settings', *Human Resource Management Review*, 13, pp.203-225.

Hartley, J. (2005) 'Case study research' in Cassell, C. and Symon, G. (eds.) *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research*. London: Sage, pp.323-333

Harvey, B.H., Rogers, J.F. and Schultze, J.A. (1983) 'Sick pay vs well pay: An analysis of the impact of rewarding employees for being on the job', *Public Personnel Management Journal*, 12(2), pp.218-224.

Harvey, J. and Nicholson, N. (1993) 'Incentives and penalties as means of influencing attendance: a study in the UK public sector', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 4(4), pp.841-858.

- Harvey, J. and Nicholson, N. (1999) 'Minor illness as a legitimate reason for absence', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 20, pp.979-993.
- Havergal, M. (1996) 'Lies, damned lies and statistics.' *Health Manpower Management*, 22(1), pp.30-31.
- Hayday, S. (2006) *Managing absence effectively*. Available at: <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pdflibrary/op2.pdf> (Accessed: 11 February 2007).
- Hayday, S. (2007) *Employee absence and attendance*. Available at: <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pdflibrary/op2.pdf> (Accessed: 19 December 2007).
- Hayday, S., Broughton, A. and Tyers, C. (2007) *Managing sickness absence in the police service: A review of current practices*. Norwich: Health and Safety Executive.
- Hayday, S. (2008) 'The fine line of absence management', *Strategic HR Review*, 7(2), pp.26-33.
- Heap, D. (2005) *Characteristics of people employed in the public sector*. Available at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/labour_market_trends/characteristics_Dec05.pdf (Accessed: 19 June 2006).
- Heraty, N. and Morley, M. (1995) 'Line managers and human resource development', *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 19(10), pp.31-37.
- Herzog, A.R. and Bachman, J.G. (1981) 'Effects of questionnaire length on response quality', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45, pp.549-559.
- Highley, J.C. and Cooper, C.L. (1994) 'Evaluating EAPs', *Personnel Review*, 23(7), pp.46-59.
- Hill, S., Woodroof, G. and Verow, P. (2007) *A pilot study into improving sickness absence recording in National Health Service acute trusts*. Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/RESEARCH/rrpdf/rr531.pdf> (Accessed: 1 April 2008).

HM Treasury (2002) *Cross-cutting review of the public sector labour market*. Available at: <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/D/9/ACF436.pdf> (Accessed: 4 April 2008).

Horder, W. (1999) 'Absent without leave: a gender perspective on the management of staff sickness in social services', *Critical Social Policy*, 19(2), pp.257-270.

Howarth, J. (2005) 'It's Monday. So who's not here?' *Management Services*, 49(1), pp.34-35.

HSE (2005) *Health and Safety Executive – Survey of workplace sickness absence and (ill) health – SWASH – 2005*. Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/swash2005.pdf> (Accessed 12 March 2007).

HSE (2006) *The well managed organisation: Guidelines for boards*. Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/pdfs/boardguidelines.pdf> (Accessed: 10 August 2007).

Hughes, J. and Sharrock, W. (1990) *The philosophy of social research*. 3rd edition edn. London: Longman.

Huselid, M. A. (1995) 'The impact of human resource management practices on turnover, productivity, and corporate financial performance.' *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(3), pp.635-672.

Hutchinson, S. (2008) *The role of front line managers in bringing policies to life*. Available at: <http://www.uwe.ac.uk/bbs/research/cesr/review/April08/Hutchinson.pdf> (Accessed: 21 November 2008).

Hutchinson, S. and Purcell, J. (2003) *Bringing policies to life: The vital role of FLMs in people management*. London: CIPD.

Hutchinson, S. and Wood, S. (1995) *The UK experience: IPD Personnel and the Line: Developing the new relationships*. London: IPD.

Hyman, J. and Summers, J. (2004) 'Lacking balance? Work-life employment practices in the modern economy', *Personnel Review*, 33(4), pp.418-429.

IDS (2008) *Absence management: IDS HR Study 810*. Available at: <http://www.incomesdata.co.uk/studies/absence.htm> (Accessed: 25 May 2008).

Investors in People (2006) *Approaches to attendance management*. Available at: <http://www.investorsinpeopledirect.co.uk:92/articles/approaches-to-attendance-management.aspx> (Accessed: 2 June 2008).

IPD (1995) *Personnel and the line: Developing the relationship*. London: Institute of Personnel and Development.

Ivancevich, J. M. (1985) 'Predicting absenteeism from prior absence and work attitudes', *Academy of Management Journal*, 28(1), pp.219-228.

Jacobson, D. (1999) 'Doing research in cyberspace', *Field Methods*, 11(2), pp.127-145.

James, P., Cunningham, I. and Dibben, P. (2002) 'Absence management and the issues of job retention and return to work', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 12(2), pp.82-94.

James, P., Cunningham, I. and Dibben, P. (2006) 'Job retention and return to work of ill and injured workers: Towards an understanding of the organisational dynamics', *Employee Relations*, 28(3), pp.290-303.

Johns, G. (1978) 'Attitudinal and nonattitudinal predictors of two forms of absence from work', *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 22, pp.431-444.

Johns, G. and Nicholson, N. (1982) 'The meanings of absence: New strategies for theory and research', *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 4, pp.127-172.

Johns, G. (1997) 'Contemporary research on absence from work: Correlates, causes, and consequences', *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 12, pp.115-174.

- Johns, G. (2003) 'How methodological diversity has improved our understanding of absenteeism from work', *Human Resource Management Review*, 13(2), pp.157-184.
- Johnson, C.J., Croghan, E. and Crawford, J. (2003) 'The problem and management of sickness absence in the NHS: considerations for nurse managers', *Journal of Nursing Management*, 11, pp.336-342.
- Judge, T.A. and Martocchio, J.J. (1995) 'The role of fairness orientation and supervisor attributions in absence disciplinary decisions', *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 10(1), pp.115-137.
- Judge, T.A., & Martocchio, J.J. (1996) 'Dispositional influences on attributions concerning absenteeism', *Journal of Management*, 22, pp.837-861.
- Judiesch, M. K. and Lyness, S.K. (1999) 'Left behind? The impact of leaves of absence on managers' career success', *Academy of Management Journal*, 42(6), pp.641-651.
- Keller, R.T. (1984) 'The role of performance and absenteeism in the prediction of turnover', *Academy of Management Journal*, 27(1), pp.176-183.
- King, G., Keohane, R.O. and Verba, S. (1994) *Designing social inquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kitchener, M., Kirkpatrick, I. and Whipp, R. (2000) 'Supervising professional work under new public management: Evidence from an 'invisible trade'', *British Journal of Management*, 11, pp.232-226.
- Kristensen, K., Juhl, H.J., Eskildsen, J., Nielsen, J., Frederiksen, N. and Bisgaard, C. (2006) 'Determinants of absenteeism in a large Danish bank', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17(9), pp.1645-1658.
- Kristensen, T.S. (1991) 'Sickness absence and work strain among Danish slaughterhouse workers: An analysis of absence from work regarded as coping behaviour', *Social Science and Medicine*, 32(1), pp.15-27.
- Kulik, C.T. and Bainbridge, H.T.J. (2006) 'HR and the line: The distribution of HR activities in Australian organisations', *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 44(2), pp.240-256.

- Labriola, M. and Lund. T. (2007) 'Self reported sickness absence as a risk marker of future disability pension: Prospective findings from the DWECS/DREAM study 1990-2004. *International Journal of Medical Sciences*, 4(3), pp.153-158.
- Lambert, E.G., Edwards, C., Camp, S.D. and Saylor, W.G. (2005) 'Here today, gone tomorrow, back again the next day: Antecedents of correctional absenteeism', *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 33, pp.165-175.
- Lana, A.T., de Leon, A.C., Garcia. M.T.M. and Jaime, A.A. (2005) 'Smoking and sickness absence among public health workers', *Public Health*, 111(2), pp.144-149.
- Larsen, H.H. and Brewster, C. (2003) 'Line management responsibility for HRM: What is happening in Europe?', *Employee Relations*, 25(3), pp.228-244.
- Lawler, E.E. and Hackman, J.R. (1969) 'Impact of employee participation in the development of pay incentive plans: A field experiment', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 53, pp.467-471.
- Lee, R.M. (1993) *Doing research on sensitive topics*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Lee, S. (1992) 'Quantitative versus qualitative research methods: Two approaches to organisation studies', *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 9(1), pp.87-94.
- Leigh, J.P. (1986) 'Correlates of absence from work due to illness', *Human Relations*, 39(1), pp.81-100.
- Leishman, F. and Savage, S.P. (1993) 'Officers or Managers? Direct entry into British Police Management.' *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 6(5), pp.4-11.
- Levin, J.M. and Kleiner, B.H. (1992) 'How to reduce organizational turnover and absenteeism', *Work study*, 41(6), pp.6-9.
- Lewis, S. and Cooper, C.L. (1995) 'Balancing the work/home interface: A European perspective', *Human Resource Management Review*, 5(4), pp.289-305.

- Lindsay, J. (2005) 'Getting the numbers: The unacknowledged work in recruiting for survey research', *Field Methods*, 17(1), pp.119-128.
- Lokke, A-K., Eskildsen, J.K. and Jensen, T.W. (2007) 'Absenteeism in the Nordic countries', *Employee Relations*, 29(1), pp.16-29.
- Loo, R. and Thorpe, K. (2004) 'Making female first-line nurse managers more effective: A Delphi study of occupational stress', *Women in Management Review*, 19(2), pp.88-97.
- Lund, E. and Gram, T. (1998) 'Response rate according to title and length of questionnaire.' *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 26(2), pp.154-160.
- Lusty, D. (2007) 'How to avoid the pitfalls of employee-satisfaction surveys', *Human Resource Management International Digest*, 15(6), pp3-6.
- Luz, J. and Green, M.S. (1997) 'Sickness absenteeism from work: A critical review of the literature', *Public Health Review*, 25, pp.89-122.
- MacNeil, C.M. (2003) 'Line managers: Facilitators of knowledge sharing teams'. *Employee Relations*, 25(3), pp.294-307.
- Majchrzak, A. (1987) 'Effects of management policies on unauthorized absence behavior', *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 23(4), pp.501-523.
- Markham, S.E., Dansereau, F. and Alutto, J.A. (1982) 'Group size and absenteeism rates: An attitudinal analysis', *Academy of Management Journal*, 25(4), pp.921-927.
- Markham, S. E. and McKee, G.H. (1995) 'Group absence behavior and standards: A multilevel analysis', *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(4), pp.1174-1190.
- Marklund, S., Bolin, M. and von Essen, J. (2008) 'Can individual health differences be explained by workplace characteristics? A multilevel analysis', *Social Science and Medicine*, 66(3), pp.650-662.
- Martocchio, J.J. (1989) 'Age-related differences in employee absenteeism: A meta-analytic review', *Psychology and Aging*, 4(4), pp.409-414.

Martocchio, J.J. and Harrison, D.A. (1993) 'To be there or not to be there? Questions, theories, and methods in absenteeism research.' *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 11(1), pp.259-328.

Martocchio, J.J. (1994) 'The effects of absence culture on individual absence', *Human Relations*, 47(3), pp.243-62.

Martocchio, J. J. and Judge, T.A. (1994) 'A policy capturing approach to individuals decisions to be absent', *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, 57(3), pp.358-386.

Martocchio, J. J. and Jimeno, D.I. (2003) 'Employee absenteeism as an affective event', *Human Resource Management Review*, 13(2), pp.227-241.

Mastekaasa, A. (2000) 'Parenthood, gender and sickness absence', *Social Science and Medicine*, 50(12), pp.1827-1842.

Maxwell, G.A. and Watson, S. (2006) 'Perspectives on line managers in human resource management: Hilton International's UK hotels', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17(6), pp.1152-1170.

McGovern, P., Gratton, L., Hope-Hailey, V., Stiles, P. and Truss, C. (1997) 'Human resource management on the line?', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 7(4), pp12-29.

McGuire, D., Stoner, L. and Mylona, S. (2008) 'The role of line managers as human resource agents in fostering organizational change in public services', *Journal of Change Management*, 8(1), pp.73-84.

McGuire, J.B. and Liro, J.R. (1987) 'Absenteeism and flexible work schedules', *Public Personnel Management*, 16(1), pp.47-59.

McHugh, M. (2001) 'Employee absence: an impediment to organisational health in local government', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 14(1), pp.43-58.

McHugh, M. (2002) 'The absence bug: A treatable viral infection?', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 17(8), pp.722-738.

- McHugh, M. and Brennan, S. (1994) 'Managing the stress of change in the Public Sector', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 7(5), pp.29-41.
- Metzner, H. and Mann, F. (1953) 'Employee attitudes and absences', *Personnel Psychology*, 6(4), pp.467-485.
- Meyer, J.P. and Allen, N.J. (1991) 'A three-component conceptualisation of organizational commitment', *Human Resource Management Review*, 1, pp.61-89.
- Michie, S. and Williams, S. (2003) 'Reducing work related psychological ill health and sickness absence: a systematic literature review', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 60(11), pp.3-9.
- Milano, C. (2005) 'Being there: can coming to work be a risk?' *Risk Management Magazine*, pp.30-34.
- Millard, B. (2007) 'Regional analysis of public sector employment', *Economic and Labour Market Review*, 1(3), pp.33-39.
- Millard, B. and Machin, A. (2007) 'Characteristics of public sector workers', *Economic and Labour Market Review*, 1(5), pp.46-53.
- Morgan, G. A., Leech, N.L., Gloeckner, G.W. and Barrett, K.C. (2004) *SPSS for Introductory Statistics: Use and Interpretation*. 2nd edn. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Moore, S., Grunberg, L and Greenberg, E. (2005) 'Are female supervisors good for employee job experiences, health and wellbeing?', *Women in Management Review*, 20(2), pp.86-95.
- Mowday, R.T. and Spencer, D.G. (1981) 'The influence of task and personality characteristics of employee turnover and absenteeism characteristics', *Academy of Management Journal*, 24(3), pp.634-642.
- Mowday, R.T., Porter, L.W. and Steers, R.M. (1982) *Employee-Organization Linkages: The Psychology of Commitment, Absenteeism and Turnover*. London: Academic Press Inc.

Mowday, R.T., Steers, R.M. and Porter, L.W. (1979) 'The measurement of organisation commitment', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 14(2), pp.224-247.

Muchinsky, P.M. (1977) 'Employee absenteeism: A review of the literature', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 10, pp.316-340.

National Audit Office (2004a) *The management of sickness absence in the Prison Service*. Norwich: The Stationery Office.

National Audit Office (2004b) *Current thinking on managing attendance: A short guide for HR professionals*. Norwich: The Stationery Office.

National Audit Office (2006) *The Management of Staff Sickness Absence in the National Probation Service*. London: The Stationery Office.

Nice, K and Thornton, P. (2004) *Job retention and rehabilitation pilot: Employers' management of long term sickness absence*. Available at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2003-2004/rrep227.pdf> (Accessed: 1 May 2008).

Nicholson, N. (1976) 'Management sanctions and absence control', *Human Relations*, 29(2), pp.139-151.

Nicholson, N., Brown, C.W. and Chadwick-Jones, J.K. (1976) 'Absence from work and job satisfaction', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 61(5), pp.728-57.

Nicholson, N. (1977) 'Absence behaviour and attendance motivation: A conceptual synthesis', *The Journal of Management Studies*, October (3), pp.232-252.

Nicholson, N., Wall, T. and Lischeron, J. (1977) 'The predictability of absence and propensity to leave from employees' job satisfaction and attitudes toward influence in decision-making', *Human Relations*, 30(6), pp.499-514.

Nicholson, N. and Johns, G. (1985) 'The absence culture and the psychological contract: Who's in control of absence?', *Academy of Management Review*, 10(3), pp.397-407.

Nicholson, N. (1993) 'Absence - There and back again', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 14(3), pp.288-290.

Nielsen, M.L., Rugulies, R., Christensen, K.B., Smith-Hansen, L. and Kristensen, T.S. (2006) 'Psychosocial work environment predictors of short and long spells of registered sickness absence During a 2-year follow up', *Journal of Environmental Medicine*, 48(6), pp.591-598.

Notenbomer, A., Roelen, C.A.M. and Groothoff, J.W. (2006) 'Job satisfaction and short-term sickness absence among Dutch workers', *Occupational Medicine*, 56(4), pp.279-281.

Ohio State University (1957) *Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire – Self*. Available at:
<http://fisher.osu.edu/supplements/10/2862/LBDQ%20SELF%201957.pdf>
(Accessed: 4 February 2007).

O'Leary, Z. (2005) *Researching real-world problems: A guide to methods of inquiry*. London: Sage.

Oppenheim, A. N. (1992) *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*. London: Continuum.

OPSC (2007) *Guide to promoting attendance in the Queensland Public Service: Understanding the key factors related to absence*. Available at:
http://www.opsc.qld.gov.au/library/docs/resources/publications/Retention/Other_Guide_KeyFactors-Absence.pdf (Accessed: 10 February 2008).

Ose, S.O. (2005) 'Working conditions, compensation and absenteeism', *Journal of Health Economics*, 24(1), pp.161-188.

Oshagbemi, T. (2000) 'Is length of service related to the level of job satisfaction?' *International Journal of Social Economics*, 27(3), pp.213-226.

Paolo, A. M., Bonaminio, G.A., Gibson, C., Partridge, T. and Kallail, K. (2000) 'Response rate comparisons of e-mail and mail distributed student evaluations', *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, 12(2), pp.81-84.

Parkinson, J. (2005) *Report to GMBC Cabinet: Employee Health – Stress*. Available at: <http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-11045/Item+07+-+Employee+Health+-+Stress.doc> (Accessed: 25 January 2006).

Patton, E. and Johns, G. (2007) 'Women's absenteeism in the popular press: Evidence for a gender-specific absence culture', *Human Relations*, 60(11), pp.1579-1612.

Peach Martins, L. (2007) 'A holistic framework for the strategic management of first tier managers', *Management Decision*, 45(3), pp.616-641.

Perry, E.L. and Kulik, C.T. (2008) 'The devolution of HR to the line: Implications for perceptions of people management effectiveness', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(2), pp.262-273.

Popp, P.O. and Belohav, J.A. (1982) 'Absenteeism in a low status work environment', *The Academy of Management Journal*, 25(3), pp.677-683.

Porter, L.W. and Steers, R.M. (1973) 'Organizational work, and personal factors in employee cutover and absenteeism', *Psychological Bulletin*, 80(2), pp151-176.

Preston, A. (1995) 'What causes absenteeism? Understanding the economic and psychological theories and evidence' in Riedel, P and Preston, A. (1995) *Managing absenteeism: Analysing and presenting labour absence*. Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service.

Prowse, P. and Prowse, J. (2007) 'Is there still a public sector model of employee relations in the United Kingdom?', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 20(1), pp.48-62.

Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Hutchinson, H., Rayton, B. and Swart, J. (2003) *Understanding the people and performance link: Unlocking the black box*. London: CIPD.

Purcell, J. and Hutchinson, S. (2007) 'Front-line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: theory, analysis and evidence', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 17(1), pp.3-20.

Quick, J.C., Macik-Frey, M and Cooper, C.L. (2007) 'Managerial dimensions of organizational health: The healthy leader at work', *Journal of Management Studies*, 44(2), pp.189-205.

Rapley, P. (2007) *Doing conversation, discourse and document analysis*. London: Sage.

Rappe, C. and Zwick, T. (2007) 'Developing leadership competence of production unit managers', *Journal of Management Development*, 26(4), pp.312-220

Reijenga, F.A. (2006) 'The role of organisational culture in sickness absence', *International Journal of Disability Management Research*, 1(1), pp.97-106.

Rentsch, J.R. and Steel, R.P. (2003) 'What does unit-level absence mean? Issues for future unit-level absence research', *Human Resource Management Review*, 13(2), pp.185-202.

Renwick, D. (2003) 'Line manager involvement in HRM: An inside view', *Employee Relations*, 25(3), pp.262-280.

Renwick, D. and MacNeill, C.M. (2002) 'Line manager involvement in careers', *Career Development International*, 7(7), pp.407-414.

Rhodes, S. and Steers, R.M. (1990) *Managing employee absenteeism*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.

Richmond, V.P., Wagner, J.P. and McCroskey, J.C. (1983) 'The impact of perceptions of leadership style, use of power, and conflict management style on organizational outcomes', *Communication Quarterly*, 31(1), pp.27-36.

Ritchie, P., Cowie, H., Graham, M., Hutchison, P., Mulholland, R., Melrose, A. and Pilkington, A. (2005) *Managing health at work – recording and monitoring information on sickness absence including health relatedness*. Norwich: Health and Safety Executive.

Robertson, J. (2005) 'Instilling better spirits', *Employee Benefits*, June, pp.19.

Robson, C. (2002) *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell.

Robson, F. (2006) 'How to manage absence effectively', *People Management*, 12(17), pp.44-45.

- Robson, F. (2007a) 'How to encourage an attendance culture', *People Management*, 13(11), pp.42-43.
- Robson, F. (2007b) 'Line managers are aware of their role in handling absence, but lack support', *People Management*, 13(17), pp.50.
- Robson, F. (2007c) 'Absence in the Public Sector – Are Managers Managing?', *CIPD Professional Standards Conference*, Keele University, Keele, 26-27 June.
- Robson, F. (2007d) 'Managing absence in Local Government: Why do Social Services Departments report consistently higher levels of absence?' *British Academy of Management Annual Conference 2007*, University of Warwick, Warwick, 12-13 September.
- Robson, F. (2008a) *Absence management*. London: CIPD.
- Robson, F. (2008b) 'Absence management: the drive for workforce well-being', *Employee Engagement Today*, 1(6), pp.25-27.
- Roelen, C.A.M., Koopmans, M.C., Notenbomer, A. and Groothof, J.W. (2008) 'Job satisfaction and sickness absence: A questionnaire survey', *Occupational Medicine*, 58(8), pp.567-571.
- Rogers, R.E. and Herting, S.R. (1993) 'Patterns of absenteeism amongst government employees', *Public Personnel Management*, 22(2), pp.215-236.
- Royal Mail (2006) *Attendance levels improve 18% across Royal Mail group*. Available at:
http://www.news.royalmailgroup.com/news/articlea.asp?id=1733&brand=royal_mail (Accessed: 29 May 2006).
- Ryan, B., Wilson, J.R., Sharples, S., Morrisroe, G. and Clarke, T. (2008) 'Developing a rail ergonomics questionnaire', *Applied Ergonomics*, (Awaiting publication).
- Saari, L.M. and Judge, T.A. (2004) 'Employee attitudes and job satisfaction', *Human Resource Management*, 43(4), pp.395-407.
- Sagie, A. (1998) 'Employee absenteeism, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction: Another look', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 54, pp.156-171.

- Sanders, K. (2004) 'Playing truant within organisations: Informal relationships, work ethics and absenteeism', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 19(2), pp.136-155.
- Sarantakos, S. (2005) *Social Research*. 3rd edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2003) *Research Methods for Business Students*. 3rd edition. Harlow: Financial Times Prentice Hall.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2006) *Research Methods for Business Students*. 4th edition. Harlow: Financial Times Prentice Hall.
- Schlotzhauer, D.L. and Rosse, J.G. (1985) 'A five year study of a positive incentive absence control program', *Personnel Psychology*, 38(3), pp.575-585.
- Schrauf, R.W. and Navarro, E. (2005) 'Using existing tests and scales in the field', *Field Methods*, 17(4), pp.373-393.
- Scott, K.D. and McLellan, E.L. (1990) 'Gender differences in absenteeism', *Public Personnel Management*, 19(2), pp.229-253.
- Scott, K.D. and Taylor, G.S. (1985) 'An examination of conflicting findings on the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism: A meta analysis', *Academy of Management Journal*, 28(3), pp.599-612.
- Secombe, I. (1995) 'Sickness absence and health at work in the NHS', *Health Manpower Management*, 21(5), pp.6-11.
- Selmer, J. (1997) 'Differences in leadership behaviour between expatriate and local bosses as perceived as perceived by their host country subordinates', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 18(1), pp.13-22.
- Seltzer, J. and Numerof, R.E. (1988) 'Supervisory leadership and subordinate burnout', *Academy of Management Journal*, 31(2), pp.439-446.
- SESR (2007) *Employee engagement in the public sector: A review of literature*. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/05/09111348/0> (Accessed: 10 May 2008).

Sgro, J.A., Worchel, P., Pence, E.C. and Orban, J.A. (1980) 'Perceived leader behavior as a function of the leader's interpersonal trust orientation', *Academy of Management Journal*, 23(1), pp.161-165

Silva, P. (2006) 'Effects of disposition on hospitality employee job satisfaction and commitment', *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 18(4), pp.317-328.

Sims, H.R., Szilagyi, A. and Keller, R. (1976) 'The measurement of job characteristics', *Academy of Management Journal*, 26(2), pp.195-212.

Siu, O-L. and Cooper, C.L. (1998) 'A study of occupational stress, job satisfaction and quitting intention in Hong Kong firms: The role of locus of control and organizational commitment', *Stress Medicine*, 14(1), pp.55-66.

Skålén, P. (2004) 'New public management reform and the construction of organizational identities', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 17(3), pp.251-263.

Smulders, P.G.W. (1983) 'Personal, nonwork and work characteristics in male and female absence behavior', *Journal of Occupational Behavior*, 4(4), pp.285-295.

Spector, P.E. (1985) 'Measurement of human service staff satisfaction: Development of the job satisfaction survey', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 13(6), pp.693-713.

Spector, P.E. (1994) *Job Satisfaction Survey*. Available at: <http://chuma.usf.edu/~spector/scales/jssnice.doc> (Accessed: 7 February 2007).

Spector, P.E. (1999) *Instructions for scoring the job satisfaction survey*. Available at: <http://chuma.usf.edu/~spector/scales/jssscore.html> (Accessed: 7 February 2007).

Spencer, D.G. and Steers, R.M. (1980) 'The influence of personal factors and perceived work experiences on employee turnover and absenteeism', *Academy of Management Journal*, 23(3), pp.567-572.

Spurgeon, A. (2002) *Managing attendance at work: An evidence-based review*. Available at: <http://www.bohrf.org.uk/downloads/attend.doc> (Accessed: 24 November 2008).

Spurgeon, P., Mazelan, P., Barwell, F. and Flanagan, H. (2007) *New directions in managing employee absence: An evidence based approach*. London: CIPD.

Steel, R.P. (2003) 'Methodological and operational issues in the construction of absence variables', *Human Resource Management Review*, 13(2), pp.243-251.

Steel, R.P. and Rentsch, J.R. (1995) 'Influence of cumulation strategies on the long-range prediction of absenteeism', *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(6), pp.1616-1634.

Steel, R.P., Rentsch, J.R. and Van Scotter, J.R. (2007) 'Timeframes and absence frameworks: A test of Steers and Rhodes' (1978) model of attendance', *Journal of Management*, 33(2), pp.180-195.

Steers, R.M. and Rhodes, S.R. (1978) 'Major influences on employee attendance: A process model', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 63(4), pp.391-407.

Stevens, S. (2005) 'Toshiba's proactive approach to employee well-being', *Strategic HR Review*, 4(3), pp.10-11.

Stumpf, S.A. and Dawley, P.K. (1981) 'Predicting voluntary and involuntary turnover using absenteeism and performance indices', *Academy of Management Journal*, 24(1), pp.148-163.

Sudman, S. and Bradburn, N.M. (1982) *Asking questions: A practical guide to questionnaire design*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Suff, P. (1998) *The evolving HR function*. London: Eclipse Group

Taimela, S., Malmivaara, A., Justen, S., Laara, E., Sintonen, H., Tiesko, J and Aro, T. (2008) 'The effectiveness of two occupational health intervention programmes in reducing sickness absence among employees at risk: Two randomised control trials', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 65(4), pp.236-241.

- Taylor, P., Baldry, C., Bain, P. and Ellis, V. (2003) 'A unique working environment: health sickness and absence management in UK call centres', *Work, Employment and Society*, 17(3), pp.435-458.
- Tharenou, P. (1993) 'A test of reciprocal causality for absenteeism', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 14(3), pp.269-290.
- Thomson, I., Neathey, F. and Rick, J. (2003) *Best practice in rehabilitating employees following absence related to work related stress*. Norwich: Health and Safety Executive.
- Thornhill, A. and Saunders, M.K. (1998) 'What if line managers don't realize they're responsible for HR? Lessons from an organization experiencing rapid change', *Personnel Review*, 27(6), pp.460-476.
- Truss, C. (2001) 'Complexities and controversies in linking HRM with organizational outcomes', *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(8), pp.1121-1149.
- Tuffin, R. (2001) *Flexible working practices in the Police Service*. Available at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/prgpdfs/prs147.pdf> (Accessed: 10 January 2008).
- Valle, M. (1999) 'Crisis, culture and charisma: The new leader's work in public organizations', *Public Personnel Management*, 28(2), pp.245-257.
- van Dierendonck, D., Le Blanc, P.M., and van Breukelen, W. (2002) 'Supervisory behavior, reciprocity and subordinate absenteeism', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 23(2), pp.84-92.
- Van Leeuwen, M.T., Blyth, F.M., March, L.M., Nicholas, M.K. and Cousins, M.J. (2006) 'Chronic pain and reduced work effectiveness: The hidden cost to Australian employers', *European Journal of Pain*, 10(2), pp.161-166.
- Vandenheuvel, A. (1994) 'Public and private sector absence: Does it differ', *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, 36(4), pp.530-545.
- Veiga, J. F. (1981) 'Plateaued versus nonplateaued managers: Career Patterns, Attitudes, and Path Potential', *Academy of Management Journal*, 24(3), pp.566-578.

- Von Thiele, U., Lindfors, P. and Lundberg, U. (2006) 'Evaluating different measures of sickness absence with respect to work characteristics', *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 34(3), pp.247-253.
- Voss, M., Floderus, B. and Diderichsen, F. (2001) 'Physical, psychosocial, and organisational factors relative to sickness absence: a study based on Sweden post', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 58(3), pp.178-184.
- Watson, C. J., Driver, R.W. and Watson, K.D. (1985) 'Methodological issues in Absenteeism research: Multiple absence measures and multivariate normality', *Academy of Management Review*, 10(3), pp.577-586.
- Watson, S. and Maxwell, G.A. (2007) 'HRD from a functionalist perspective: The views of line managers', *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 9(1), pp.31-41.
- Watson, S., Maxwell, G.A. and Farquharson, L. (2007) 'Line managers' views on adopting human resource roles: the case of Hilton (UK) hotels', *Employee Relations*, 29(1), pp.30-49.
- Weber, R. (2004) 'The rhetoric of positivism versus interpretivism: A personal view', *MIS Quarterly*, 28(1), pp.iii-xii.
- Whitaker, S.C. (2001) 'The management of sickness absence', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 58(6), pp.420-424.
- White, M., Hill, S., Mills, C. and Smeaton, D. (2003) 'High-performance management practices, working hours and work-life balance', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41(2), pp.175-195.
- Whittaker, S. and Marchington, M. (2003) 'Devolving HR responsibility to the line: threat, opportunity or partnership?', *Employee Relations*, 25(3), pp.245-261.
- Williams, N. (2008) 'Absence management suffers as line managers steer clear of involvement', *Personnel Today*, 28 May 2008.

- Wilkinson, A. (2006) *How to manage sickness absence*. Available at: http://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/download/136/How_to_manage_sickness_absence.pdf (Accessed: 10 September 2007).
- Winkler, D.R. (1980) 'The effects of sick-leave policy on teacher absenteeism', *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 33(2), pp.232-240.
- Wooden, M. (1990) 'The 'Sickie': A public sector phenomenon?' *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, 32(4), pp.560-576.
- Wynn, P. and Low, A. (2008) 'The effect of social deprivation on local authority sickness absence rates', *Occupational Medicine*, 58(4), pp.263-267.
- Yin, R.K. (1981) 'The case study crisis: Some answers', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26(1), pp.58-65.
- Yin, R.K. (1994) *Case study research: Design and methods*. 2nd edition. California: Sage
- Yukl, G., Gordon, A. and Taber, T. (2002) 'A hierarchical taxonomy of leadership behavior: integrating a half century of behavior research', *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 9(1), pp.15-32.
- Zaccaro, S.J., Craig, B. and Quinn, J. (1991) 'Prior absenteeism, supervisory style, job satisfaction, and personal characteristics: An investigation of some mediated and moderated linkages to work absenteeism', *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, 50(1), pp.21-44.

10. Bibliography

Albrecht, S. and Travaglione, A. (2003) 'Trust in public-sector senior management', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(1), pp.76-92.

Allen, W.D. (1996) 'Family illness and temporary work absence', *Applied Economics*, 28, pp.1177-1180.

Anderson, T. (2005) 'Employers miss standard measure for absences', *Benefits Finance*, 12, pp.81-82.

Andrea, H., Beurskens, A.J.H.M., Metsemakers, J.F.M., van Amelsvoort, L.G.P.M., van den Brandt, P.A. and van Schayk, C.P. (2003) 'Health problems and psychosocial work environment as predictors of long term sickness absence in employees who visited the occupational physician and/or general practitioner in relation to work: a prospective study', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 60, pp.295-300.

Arai, M. and Thoursie, P.S. (2005) 'Incentives and selection in cyclical absenteeism', *Labour Economics*, 12, pp.269-280.

Balcombe, J., Strange, N. and Tate, G. (1993) *Wish you were here: How UK and Japanese owned organisations manage attendance*. London: The Industrial Society.

Bartram, T., Stanton, P., Leggat, S., Casimir, G. and Fraser, B. (2007) 'Lost in translation: exploring the link between HRM and performance in healthcare', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 17(1), pp.21-41.

Breaugh, J. A. (1981) 'Relationships between recruiting sources and employee performance, absenteeism, and work attitudes', *Academy of Management Journal*, 24 (1), pp.142-147.

Brown, S. (1999) 'Worker absenteeism and overtime bans.' *Applied Economics*, 31, pp.165-174.

CBI (2003) *Absence and labour turnover 2003: The lost billions: Addressing the cost of absence*. London: CBI.

- CBI (2004) *Room for improvement: Absence and labour turnover 2004*. London: CBI.
- CBI (2005) *Who cares wins: Absence and labour turnover 2005*. London: CBI.
- CBI (2006) *Absence minded: Absence and labour turnover 2006*. London: CBI.
- Chelius, J. R. (1981) 'Understanding Absenteeism: The Potential Contribution of Economic Theory', *Journal of Business Research*, 9, pp.409-418.
- Chough, S. and Kleiner, B.H. (2003) 'The no-fault attendance policy in the era of the family and medical leave act', *Management Research News*, 26 (2/3/4), pp.185-192.
- CIPD (2004) *Employee absence 2004: A survey of management policy and practice*. London: CIPD.
- CIPD (2005) *Absence management: A survey of policy and practice*. London: CIPD.
- CIPD (2006) *Absence management: Survey report July 2006*. London: CIPD.
- Cole, T. C. and Kleiner, B.H. (1992) 'Absenteeism control', *Management Decision*, 30(2), pp.12-16.
- Coulter, C. H. (2006) 'The employer's case for health management', *Benefits Quarterly*, First quarter, pp.23-33.
- Coyle-Shapiro, J. A. M. and Kessler, I. (2002) 'Exploring reciprocity through the lens of the psychological contract: Employee and employer perspectives', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 11(1), pp.69-86.
- CVOS Committee (2005b) *Meeting held on 18th July 2005*. Available at: <http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-1555> (Accessed: 20 January 2006).
- CVOS Committee (2006b) *Meeting held on 6th March 2006*. Available at: <http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-1830> (Accessed: 25 July 2006).

CVOS Committee (2006c) *Meeting held on 12th June 2006*. Available at: <http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-1992> (Accessed: 25 July 2006).

CVOS Committee (2007b) *Meeting held on 26th February 2007*. Available at: <http://online.gateshead.gov.uk/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-2239> (Accessed 10 May 2007).

Daley, D. M. (1991) 'Management practices and the Uninvolved Manager: The effect of supervisory attitudes on perceptions of organizational trust and change orientation', *Public Personnel Management*, 20(1), pp.101-113.

Dalton, D.R. and Mesch, D.J. (1991) 'On the extent and reduction of avoidable absenteeism: An assessment of absence policy provisions', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76(6), pp.810-817.

Dalton, D.R. and Mesch, D.J. (1992) 'The impact of employee-initiated transfer on absenteeism: A four year cohort assessment', *Human Relations*, 45(3), pp.291-304.

Dalton, D.R. and Perry, J.L. (1981) 'Absenteeism and the collective bargaining agreement', *Academy of Management Journal*, 24(2), pp.425-431.

Daniels, S. (1997) 'Employee assistance programmes', *Work study*, 46(7), pp.251-253.

Dibben, P., James, P. and Cunningham, I. (2001c) 'Senior management commitment to disability: The influence of legal compulsion and best practice', *Personnel Review*, 30(4), pp.454-467.

Edwards, P. and Whitston, C. (1993) *Attending to work: The management of attendance and shopfloor order*. Oxford: Blackwell Business.

Fichman, M. (1988) 'Motivational consequences of absence and attendance: Proportional hazard estimation of a dynamic motivation model', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 73(1), pp.119-134.

Fichman, M. (1989) 'Attendance makes the heart grow fonder: A hazard rate approach to modelling attendance', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74(2), pp.325-335.

Fielding, J. and Gilbert, N. (2000) *Understanding Social Statistics*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Ford, J.E. (1981) 'A simple punishment procedure for controlling employee absenteeism', *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, 3(2), pp.71-79.

Gardiner, M. and Tiggemann, M. (1999) 'Gender differences in leadership style, job stress and mental health in male- and female- dominated industries', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 72, pp.301-315.

Gilbreath, B. and Benson, P.G. (2004) 'The contribution of supervisor behaviour to employee psychological well-being', *Work and Stress*, 18(3), pp.255-266.

Gill, J. and Johnson, P. (1997) *Research Methods for Managers*. 2nd edn. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Goles, T. and Hirschheim, R. (2000) 'The paradigm is dead, the paradigm is dead... long live the paradigm', *Omega*, 20, pp.249-268.

Gupta, N. and Jenkins, J.D. Jnr. (1983) 'Tardiness as a manifestation of employee withdrawal', *Journal of Business Research*, 11, pp.61-75.

Haccoun, R.R. and Desgent, C. (1993) 'Perceived reasons and consequences of work absence: A survey of French-speaking employees in Quebec', *International Journal of Psychology*, 28(1), pp.97-117.

Harbaugh, W.T. and van den Nouweland, A. (2005) 'Demonstrating worker quality through strategic absenteeism', *International Game Theory Review*, 7(2), pp.189-209.

Harris, L. (2002) 'Rewarding employee performance: line managers' values, beliefs and perspectives', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 12(7), pp.1182-1192.

Hartley, J. and Allison, M. (2000) 'The role of leadership in the modernization and improvement of public services', *Public Money and Management*, April - June, pp.35-40.

Heery, E. and Salmon, J. (ed.) (2000) *The Insecure Workforce*. London: Routledge.

Hesselius, P. (2006) 'Does sickness absence increase the risk of unemployment?' *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 36(2), pp.288-310.

HSE (2008) *Management standards for work-related stress*. Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm> (Accessed: 7 July 2008).

Hutchison, P.A., Ritchie, P.J., and Cowie, H.A. (2006) *Survey of tools and resources available to employers to manage, record and monitor sickness absence*. Norwich: Health and Safety Executive.

Ilozor, B.D., Treloar, G.J., Olomolaiye, P.O. and Okoroh, M.I. (2001) 'FM Puzzle: sick building and Sydney's open-plan offices', *Facilities*, 19 (13/14), pp.484-493.

James, P., Bruyere, S. and Cunningham, I. (1997) 'Absence and disability management', *Review of Employment Topics*, 5(1), pp.152-184.

Jick, T. D. (1979) 'Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action.' *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24, pp.602-611.

Johnson, P. R. and Indvik, J. (1997) 'Blue on blue: depression in the workplace', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 12(6), pp.359-364.

Kent, R. (2001) *Data construction and data analysis for survey research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Kerr, R., Boyle, E. and Heaton, N. (2006) 'Supervisory emotional intelligence and subordinate absenteeism, is there a relationship?' *British Academy of Management Annual Conference 2006*. University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast. Belfast. 12th-14th September.

Khojasteh, M. (1993) 'Motivating Private vs public sector managers', *Public Personnel Management*, 22(3), pp.391-401.

Krippendorff, K. (2004) *Content Analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks: California: Sage Publications Inc.

Labour Research Department (1999) *Sickness absence policy: A trade unionists guide*.

La Pelle, N. (2004) 'Simplifying qualitative data analysis using general purpose software tools', *Field Methods*, 16(1), pp.85-108.

Larson, E. W. and Fukami, C.V. (1985) 'Employee absenteeism: The role of ease of movement', *Academy of Management Journal*, 28(2), pp.464-471.

Lee, T.W., Mitchell, T.R., Sablinski, S.J., Burton, J.P. and Holtom, T.C. (2004) 'The effects of job embeddedness on organizational citizenship, job performance, volitional absences and voluntary turnover', *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(5), pp. 711-722.

Little, L.M., Simmons, B.L. and Nelson, D.L. (2007) 'Health among leaders: Positive and negative effect, engagement and burnout, forgiveness and revenge', *Journal of Management Studies*, 44(2), pp.243-260.

Llewellyn, S. and Tappin, S. (2003) 'Strategy in the public sector: Management in the wilderness', *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(4), pp.955-982.

Lok, P. and Crawford, J. (1999) 'The relationship between commitment and organizational culture, subculture, leadership style and job satisfaction in organizational change and development', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 20(7), pp.365-373.

Markham, S.E., Dansereau, F. and Alutto, J.A. (1982a) 'Female vs male absence rates: A temporal analysis', *Personnel Psychology*, 35(2), pp.371-382.

Markham, S.E. (1985) 'An investigation into the relationship between unemployment and absenteeism: A multi level approach', *Academy of Management Journal*, 28 (1), pp. 228-234.

Markham, S. E. and McKee, G.H. (1991) 'Declining organizational size and increasing unemployment rates: Predicting employee absenteeism from within and between plant perspectives', *Academy of Management Journal*, 34(4), pp.952-964.

Marsh, C. (1994) *Exploring data: An introduction to Data Analysis for Social Services*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Martocchio, J.J. and Judge, T.A. (1995) 'When we don't see eye to eye: Discrepancies between supervisors and subordinates in absence disciplinary decisions', *Journal of Management*, 21(2), pp.251-278.

McAdam, R., Hazlett, S-A. and Casey, C. (2006) 'Performance management in the UK public sector: Addressing multiple stakeholder complexity', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 18(3), pp.255-273.

McGillivray, D. (2002) 'Health promotion in the workplace: A missed opportunity?' *Health Education*, 100(2), pp.60-67.

McKevitt, C., Morgan, M., Dundas, R. and Holland, W.W. (1997) 'Sickness absence and 'working through' illness: A comparison of two professional groups', *Journal of Public Health Medicine*, 9(3), pp.295-300.

Meyer, J. P. and Allen, N.J. (1997) *Commitment in the workplace: Theory, Research and Application*. Thousand Oaks: California: Sage.

Noblet, A., Cooper, C., McWilliams, J. and Rudd, A. (2007) 'Wellbeing, job satisfaction and commitment among Australian community health workers: The relationship with working conditions', *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 13(3), pp.40-48.

Noon, M. and Blyton, P. (2002) *The realities of work*. 2nd edition. Hampshire: Palgrave.

Northern Ireland Audit Office (2008) *Management of sickness absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service*. Belfast: The Stationery Office.

Oswick, C. and Grant, D. (1996) 'Personnel management in the public sector: power, roles and relationships', *Personnel Review*, 25(2), pp.4-18.

Pauly, M. V., Nicholson, S., Xu, J., Polsky, D., Danzon, P.M., Murray, J.F. and Berger, M.L. (2002) 'A general model of the impact of absenteeism on employers and employees', *Health Economics*, 11(3), pp.221-231.

- Parikh, P., Taukari, A. and Bhattacharya, T. (2004) 'Occupational stress and coping among nurses', *Journal of Health Management*, 6(2), pp.115-127.
- Parker, P.A. and Kulik, J.A. (1995) 'Burnout, self- and supervisor-related job performance, and absenteeism among Nurses', *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 18(6), pp.581-599.
- Parkes, K.R. (1983) 'Smoking as a moderator of the relationship between affective state and absence from work', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 65(4), pp.698-708.
- Perrott, S. (2002) 'Gender, professions and management in the public sector', *Public Money and Management*, 22(1), pp.21-24.
- Perry, E.L., Kulik, C.T. and Zhou, J. (1999) 'A closer look at the effects of subordinate-supervisor age differences', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 20(3), pp.341-357.
- Pires, G., Stanton, J. and Cheek, B. (2003) 'Identifying and reaching an ethnic market: Methodological issues', *Qualitative Market Research*, 6(4), pp.224-235.
- Pondy, L.R. and Pate, L.E. (1989) 'A longitudinal field study of the intervention process using archival measures of employee absenteeism and turnover', *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 2(2), pp.40-52.
- Pratchett, L. and Wingfield, M. (1996) 'Petty bureaucracy and woolly-minded liberalism? The Changing ethos of local government officers', *Public Administration*, 74(4), pp.639-656.
- Price, J.L. (1995) 'A role for demographic variables in the study of absenteeism and turnover', *The International Journal of Career Management*, 7(5), pp.26-32.
- Prins, R. (1992) *Sickness absence in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands*. Amsterdam: NIA.
- Prior, L. (2003) *Using Documents in Social Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Prottas, D.J. (2008) 'Perceived behavioral integrity: Relationships with employee attitudes, well-being and absenteeism', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 81(2), pp.313-322.

Ramsey, J., Punnett, B.J, and Greenidge, D. (2008) 'A social psychological account of absenteeism in Barbados', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 18(2), pp.97-117.

Renwick, D. (2003b) 'HR Managers: Guardians of employee wellbeing?', *Personnel Review*, 32(3), pp.341-359.

Rhodes, S. and Steers, R. (1981) 'A systematic approach to diagnosing employee absenteeism', *Employee Relations*, 3(2), pp.17-22.

Robinson, B. (2002) 'An integrated approach to managing absence supports greater organizational productivity', *Employee Benefits Journal*, 27(2), pp.7-11.

Roberts, B. W., Oleksandr, S., Chernyshenko, O.S., Stark, S. and Goldberg, L.R. (2005) 'The structure of conscientiousness: An empirical investigation based on seven major personality questionnaires', *Personnel Psychology*, 58(1), pp.103-139.

Savery, L.K. (1994) 'The influence of the perceived styles of leadership of a group of workers on their attitudes to work', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 15(4), pp.12-18.

Schraeder, M., Tears, R.S. and Jordan, M.H. (2005) 'Organizational culture in public sector organizations. Promoting change through training and leading by example', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 26(6), pp.492-502.

Sheridan, J.E. (1985) 'A catastrophe model of employee withdrawal leading to low job performance, high absenteeism, and job turnover during the first year of employment', *Academy of Management Journal*, 28(1), pp.88-109.

Silva, P. (2006) 'Effects of disposition on hospitality employee job satisfaction and commitment', *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 18(4), pp.317-328.

Skinner, D., Saunders, M.N.K. and Duckett, D. (2004) 'Policies, promises and trust: improving working lives in the National Health Service', *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 17(7), pp.558-570.

Stewart, D.W. and Kamins, M.A. (1993) *Secondary Research: Information sources and methods*. 2nd edition. California: Sage Publications Inc.

Storey, J. (1989) 'Human resource management in the public sector', *Public Money and Management*, 9(3), pp.19-24.

Stout, J.K. (1984) 'Supervisors' structuring and consideration behaviors and workers' job satisfaction, stress, and health problems', *Rehabilitation Bulletin*, 28(2), pp.133-138.

Templer, A.J. (1973) 'Self-perceived and others-perceived leadership style using the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire', *Personnel Psychology*, 26(3), pp.359-367.

van Saane, N., Sluiter, J.K., Verbeek, J.H.A.M. and Frings-Dresen, M.H.W. (2003) 'Reliability and validity of instruments measuring job satisfaction - a systematic review', *Occupational Medicine*, 53(3), pp.191-200.

van Teijlingen, E.R., Rennie, A-M. and Graham, W. (2001) 'The importance of conducting and reporting pilot studies: The example of the Scottish Births Survey', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 34(3), pp.289-295.

Vandenheuvel, A. and Wooden, M. (1995) 'Do explanations of absence differ for men and women?', *Human Relations*, 48(11), pp.1309-1329.

Virtanen, T. (2000) 'Changing competences of public managers: tensions in commitment', *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 13(4), pp.333-341.

Weber, R.P. (1990) *Basic Content Analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

Winfield, I. and Rushing, B. (2005) 'Bridging the border between work and family: The effects of supervisor-employee similarity', *Sociological Inquiry*, 75(1), pp.55-80.

Wood, M.T. and Sobel, R.S. (1970) 'Effects of similarity of leadership style at two levels of management on the job satisfaction of the first level manager', *Personnel Psychology*, 23(4), pp.577-590.

Worrall. L., Cooper. C.L. and Campbell-Jamison, F. (2000) 'The impact of organizational change on the work experiences and perceptions of public sector managers', *Personnel Review*, 29(5), pp.613-636.

Zashin, S.S. (1997) 'The leave of absence puzzle - fitting the pieces together', *Public Personnel Management Journal*, 26(4), pp.471-481.

Zeffane, R. (1994) 'Patterns of organizational commitment and perceived management style: A comparison of public and private sector employees', *Human Relations*, 47(8), pp.977-1010.